SWEATED INDUSTRY

AND THE

MINIMUM WAGE

"The whole spectacle of poverty indeed is incredible. As soon as you cease to have it before your eyes—even when you have it before your eyes—you can hardly believe it, and that is perhaps why so many people deny that it exists, or is much more than a superstition of the sentimentalist."

W. D. HOWELLS.

"The system which produces the happiest moral effects will be found most beneficial to the interest of the individual and the common weal; upon this basis the science of political economy will rest at last, when the ponderous volumes with which it has been overlaid shall have sunk by their own weight into the dead sea of oblivion."

R. SOUTHEY

SWEATED INDUSTRY

AND THE

MINIMUM WAGE

BY

CLEMENTINA BLACK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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So many persons have kindly helped me with material for this volume that it is impossible to name all of them; but I cannot forbear to express my thanks to Mr W. Pember Reeves, to Mr Tom Garnett of Clitheroe, to my old friends Mrs Bogue Luffmann and Mr H. H. Champion, who have collected information for me in Australia, and last, but not least, to Mr Gardiner for his valuable introduction.

C. B.

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INTRODUCTION

THE sweating evil has long engaged the attention of social and industrial workers in many fields. Some have approached it from the philanthropic point of view, and have sought a remedy in voluntary means such as consumers' leagues; others have approached it from the point of view of industrial organisation, and have sought to deal with it by the extension of trade unionism and legislative action. So far all efforts alike have been futile. The evil is too widespread and too remote in its operations to be touched by charity. It involves a class too forlorn, too isolated, and too impoverished to be reached by trade unionism. The cry of the victims has hitherto been too feeble and hopeless to command the attention of Parliament.

This has happily been changed by the object lesson presented by the Sweating Exhibition organised by *The Daily News* last May and opened by the Princess Henry of Battenberg. That exhibition, held right in the heart of West London, visited by thirty thousand people, and

commanding the attention of all serious students of our social system, brought the question instantly into the sphere of practical politics. Sweating was no longer a vague term concerning some more or less apocryphal wrongs. It was made real and actual. It was seen to be not an excrescence on the body politic, having no bearing upon its general health, but an organic disease. It was seen to be an evil not simply affecting some obscure lives in the mean streets of our cities, but an evil that wasted the whole industrial physique — a running sore that affected the entire fabric of society, a morass exhaling a miasma that poisoned the healthy elements of industry. Its spectre haunted not only the fever dens of the slums, but was present in the most costly garments of the most fashionable West-End shops, in the rich embroideries of the wealthy as well as in the household matchbox. Well dressed people who came with the comfortable belief that sweated goods were necessarily cheap goods realised with a shock that cheapness and sweating had no intrinsic relationship. They saw with more or less clearness that sweating reduced to its true meaning was not the oppression of the poor in the interests of the poor; but the effort of an uneconomic

system to extract from the misery of the unorganised, ill-equipped worker the equivalent of organised, well paid and well equipped industry. It was the competition of flesh and blood with machinery. Sweating, it was seen, did not make goods cheap: it only made human life cheap. It did not benefit the consumer: it only benefited the man who set the slum to compete with the workshop, the man or more often the woman and the child to compete with the machine. It was seen that the evil lowered the whole vitality of industry. It preyed upon the defenceless and used them to depress the general industrial standard. It had no chance in a highly organised community, and found its victims in the hopeless and the broken, among the poor widows of the courts and alleys and all those who had lost heart in the battle and were sunk into the lowest depths of the social abyss.

Not the least disquieting revelation that emerged from the Exhibition and the lectures which accompanied it was the bearing of the evil upon our collective life. The sweated reacted upon the community. It was seen that they not only lowered the industrial standard: they were a menace to the communal good, a drain upon the resources of

society in the interests of the people who exploited them. They provided a reserve of incredibly cheap labour which the community had to subsidise from the rates. Having no power of combination or resistance they were beaten down by the employer far below the barest means of subsistence, and the task of keeping them alive was left to the public. This was the case even when they were employed; but in many instances the work was seasonal and subject to long periods of unemployment. Then their whole existence depended upon a mingling of pauperism and charity until a fresh demand for their labour sprang up, and the public purse was relieved of some portion of the task of keeping them alive. It was seen, in short, that sweating meant the maintenance out of the rates of a vast mass of low class labour which enabled the sweater to compete successfully with high class labour. Many of the complaints of high rates in the East End for example came from the very firms whose high dividends were actually being paid out of the rates in the form of poor relief to the underpaid worker.

The bearing of the evil upon child life was made equally clear. It was not merely that the children of the sweated were ill-nourished

and ill-clad. They were made to take their share in the incessant struggle for food. They too became competitors with healthy industry, and by increasing the family output actually served to still further lower the starvation wages. For in this social morass there is no minimum. The excess of labour is so great and the demand for food so urgent that the tendency is constantly downward. It is a fight for bread in which the sweater plays off the dire misery of these against the deeper misery of those. And in this struggle the child life of the slums is used as a counter in the game and a new generation of the physically unfit and socially dead springs up like rank weeds to choke the hope and effort of the future.

Finally, it was made clear that sweating is the enemy of the development of industry. It makes it possible to extract from the necessities of the poor what ought to be extracted from highly developed processes. It checks the natural evolution of commercial effort by an uneconomic substitute. Mr Sidney Webb states this point with much force in his "Industrial Democracy" when he says:

"We arrive, therefore, at the unexpected

result that the enforcement of definite minimum conditions of employment positively stimulates the invention and adoption of new processes of manufacture. This has been repeatedly remarked by the opponents of Trade Unionism. Thus Babbage, in 1832, described in detail how the invention and adoption of new methods of forging and welding gun-barrels was directly caused by the combined insistence on better conditions of employment by all the workmen engaged in the old process. 'In this difficulty,' he says, 'the contractors resorted to a mode of welding the gun-barrel according to a plan for which a patent had been taken out by them some years before the event. It had not then succeeded so well as to come into general use, *in consequence of the cheapness of the usual mode of welding by hand labour*, combined with some other difficulties with which the patentee had had to contend. But *the stimulus produced by the combination of the workmen for this advance of wages* induced him to make a few trials, and he was enabled to introduce such a facility in welding gun-barrels by roller, and such perfection in the work itself, that in all probability very few will in future be welded by hand-labour.'"

The profound impression made by the Exhibition found expression in a universal desire for action. The question one heard again and again was "What can we do? What can we do?" It was the question which the Princess of Wales asked as she passed round the stalls where the workers were engaged at their various forms of slavery. It was the question which continued like a hopeless refrain throughout the six weeks of the Exhibition. Most people came with vague ideas of the evil and went away with vaguer ideas of the remedy. Many of them were doubtless glad to forget this contact with that other forlorn world which seemed such a disquieting challenge to the splendour and luxury of the world of society. It was a painful interlude between a visit to the shops in the morning and a visit to the theatre in the evening.

The general feeling however was not one of idle curiosity, but of grave concern, and when the Exhibition closed it was felt that the public conscience once awakened must not be allowed to go to sleep again. The Exhibition had been an appeal to the individual; but all experience showed that voluntary action on the part of the individual, while worthy and

desirable, would not touch the evil. Consumers' leagues had been at work in this country and still more in America; but they had done little to reduce the vast sum of misery. If the Exhibition was to bear fruit it must be in the direction of legislative action.

The immediate outcome was the formation of the Anti-Sweating League to secure a minimum wage, and later in the year a three days' conference, opened by the Lord Mayor and representing two millions organised workers, was held at the Guildhall. This conference, which was addressed on various aspects of the evil and its remedy by authorities like Sir Chas. Dilke, Lord Dunraven, Mr Pember Reeves, Mr Sidney Webb, Mr J. A. Hobson, Mr Bernard Wise, Miss Clementina Black and others, unanimously endorsed the programme of the League which was embodied in the Bill now before Parliament. That Bill is purely experimental. It is based upon the lines of the Victorian Wages Board system and is applied only to a certain group of trades which furnish the best field for an experiment which has become firmly established and generally operative in the Australian colony. Many authorities prefer the Arbitration system of New South Wales and New Zealand, but the difficulty in

the way of the adoption of that system in this country is the opposition of the trade unions. All are agreed on the principle of the minimum wage, and the Wages Board has been accepted as the only possible legislative expression of that principle in this country. So far as can be seen, then, the Bill offers the one available remedy for an evil which all are agreed must be dealt with.

It is not necessary here to argue at length the case for the principle of the minimum wage. Those interested in the subject will find it stated in the addresses given at the Guildhall Conference and published in pamphlet form by the National Anti-Sweating League, Salisbury Square, E.C. It is forty-seven years since Ruskin shocked the economists of his time by declaring for the regulation of wages irrespective of the demand for labour.

"Perhaps one of the most curious facts in the history of human error," he said, "is the denial by the common political economist of the possibility of thus regulating wages; while for all the important and much of the unimportant labour on the earth, wages are already so regulated.

"We do not sell our Prime-Ministership by

Dutch auction; nor on the decease of a bishop, whatever may be the general advantages of simony, do we (yet) offer his diocese to the clergyman who will take the episcopacy at the lowest contract. We (we exquisite sagacity of political economy) do indeed sell commissions; but not openly, generalships; sick, we do not inquire for a physician who takes less than a guinea; litigious, we never think of reducing six-and-eightpence to four-and-sixpence; caught in a shower, we do not canvass the cabmen, to find one who values his driving at less than sixpence a mile."

Ruskin was duly punished. The publishers closed their magazines against such revolutionary teaching, and Carlyle's "ten thousand sparrows" chirped in one furious chorus the current equivalent for "Socialism" and "Wastrel."

To-day the minimum wage, like so much else of Ruskin's teaching, is a commonplace of the industrial system. No Government or municipality to-day issues a contract which does not contain a fair wages clause which is drawn up irrespective of the demand for labour, and every healthy organised industry has a fixed scale which is dependent on prices, it is true, but which is wholly in-

dependent of the demand and supply of labour. The whole teaching of modern industry is that cheap labour is dear labour, and that it is as important for successful competition to have a well equipped human instrument as to have well equipped machinery.

To take the example of the cotton trade. Sixty years ago the condition of the Lancashire trade was deplorable. It was based largely on sweated labour, including the labour of wretched little slaves drafted in groups from the workhouses, and kept alive on porridge, their compound a shed or barn on the premises. To-day there is no industry more highly organised, and no class of worker —certainly no class of female worker—more adequately paid. Trade unionism with its fixed wage has made the Lancashire cotton trade the most wonderful industrial organism in the world. Four thousand miles from its raw material, ten thousand miles from its greatest market, it yet dominates the cotton industry as completely as our shipping trade, with all its relative advantages in regard to raw material and geographical situation, dominates the shipping industry of the world. Not least important is the peace which this high state of organisation has produced in the

trade. It is many years since there was a serious conflict in Lancashire.

The cotton trade in a word has had this enormous success not because labour is cheap, but because labour is dear—and good; because the human machine being kept at the highest point of perfection is the most productive instrument of its kind in the world. It has succeeded, above all, because the standard wage has removed the competition of low class, sweated labour, which is not only iniquitous in itself, but which has the effect of depreciating the whole currency of industry.

And in depreciating the currency of industry it lowers the general standard of the community. Where wages are low, there the poor rate is necessarily high, and the general trader shares in the universal impoverishment. For it must be remembered that the working classes are the bedrock of commerce. Their condition reacts immediately upon society. The money they receive comes back instantly in a fertilising stream to the grocer, the bootmaker, and the clothier. These get nothing but bad debts and insolvency from the operations of the sweater, whose poor instruments, more-

over, in falling upon the public purse, still further depress the shopkeeper.'

What has happened in the cotton trade may be paralleled by the experience of other trades. Wherever sweating has been eliminated by the regulation of wages, the health of the trade is established. Wherever the trade is only partly organised, as in the umbrella, the boot or the tailoring trade, the wholesome part suffers by the competition of those whose stock in trade is the misery of the unorganised poor. As an illustration of this competition I may quote the following comparison given by Miss Gertrude Tuckwell at the Guildhall Conference.

AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF TAILORS AND TAILORESSES.

STATEMENT OF PRICES AS AGREED TO BETWEEN THIS BODY AND THE LONDON MASTER TAILORS' ASSOCIATION, AND OF THE "SWEATED" RATES FOR SIMILAR WORK.

	TRADE UNION.	NON-UNION.
Making Dress Coat	£1. 5s. 6d. to £1. 7s. 6d. (6d. to 7d. per hour).	10s. to 16s. (These are prices where middleman is employed —16s. rarely reached.)
Gentleman's Frock Coat	Do.	Do.
Dress Vest	8s. to 9s. 6d.	2s. 6d.
Dress Trousers	7s. 6d. to 8s. 5d.	2s. to 4s.

Ladies' Costume—			
Pressing	With very little extras) 30s.		2½d.
Machining			9d.
Baisting			7d.
Felling			1½d.
			—1s. 7¾d.
Ladies' Jackets—			
Pressing	23s.		1½d.
Baisting			3½d.
Machining			4½d.
Felling			½d.
			—9¾d.

Ninepence three farthings against twenty three shillings! How is it possible for honest industry to compete against this exploitation of flesh and blood subsidised by the rate-payer? It was staggering facts of this sort that induced the Guildhall Conference to go beyond the scope of its reference by passing an amendment calling for the abolition of the outworker in all trades and the provision of workshop accommodation.

Trade-unionism has succeeded in regulating wages in the great industries whose operations can only be carried on on a great collective scale; but trade-unionism alone is clearly unable to destroy sweating in the many industries in which the fabrication of the parts is let and sub-let until the origin of the whole is found in the dim, one-roomed tenement of the slum where the victim of the sweater carries on her tragic struggle with famine.

"Isn't the remedy Protection?" was a question frequently heard at the lectures given at the Exhibition? Most of us would agree with Mr Bernard Shaw who, in answering such a question, said he would be ready to protect our industry against sweated competition. But the general operation of Protection would be wholly in the interest of the sweater. It would put a new premium upon his vocation. And the fact remains that sweating is more rampant in protected countries even than in our own. It was the Berlin Exhibition which suggested the *Daily News* Exhibition, and since that event there has been an exhibition in Philadelphia which has shown that the horrors of sweating in Protectionist America go deeper even than those in Free Trade England. And it is three of our Protectionist colonies which, realising the social menace of this trade in misery, have indicated the true path of reform. They have realised that the community must protect not only the individual but itself against a traffic which is slavery in the thinnest disguise, and which is not only cruel to the individual but destructive of honest industry and ruinous to social health. The policy which Australia has applied holds the field as the one effective

remedy discovered for dealing with this appalling social evil. The victims cannot protect themselves. They are beyond the reach of organisation. In their isolation and poverty they have no defence against the raids of the conscienceless sub-contractor who is as literal a slave-driver as any who ever wielded a whip in the cotton fields, a slave-driver none the less because his whip is hunger instead of thongs.

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> How shall your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
> From seasons such as these? Oh, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this.

It is the State alone which can take care of them, protect them against the rapacity of the oppressor and, in protecting them, protect itself also. For this is primarily not a problem for pity; but a duty to the commonwealth. No Society can be sound in health which has at its base this undrained morass of wretchedness — a morass which charity and the cold mercy of the Poor Law only develop and which social justice can alone drain dry.

PART I

SWEATED INDUSTRY

CHAPTER I

THE POOREST OF ALL

'Sweating'—General interpretation of the term—Work in the worker's home—Some special investigations—Characteristics of home-work—Match-box making—The process—The payment—History of the Jarvis family—Shirt-making—Some individual cases—Paper-bag making—Some cases—Some men home-workers—Racquet balls—The process—The payment—Health of home-workers—The married woman and the single woman as home-workers—Brush-making—Mrs Hogg's description—Tooth-brushes—Other trades and rates of pay—Home-work, under-payment, and high-priced goods.

THE term "sweating," to which at one time the notion of sub-contract was attached, has gradually come to be applied to almost any method of work under which workers are extremely ill-paid or extremely over-worked; and the "sweater" means nowadays "the employer who cuts down wages below the level of decent subsistence, works his operatives for excessive hours, or compels them to toil under insanitary conditions." It is in this wide general sense that the word will be employed in these pages; and the

first part of this volume will be devoted to showing how wide-spread is the prevalence of sweating throughout the whole field of British industry.

Probably the most completely wretched workers in our country may be found among those who ply their toil in their own poor homes. It is by no means the case that all home-work is sweated; but it is the fact that a good deal of home-work, in this country and in others, exists solely because the home-worker can be ground down to the lowest stage of misery. As an acute French observer writes:—

"Home-work, or at least an important fraction of that industry, is in the odd condition of only surviving on account of its evils. Low pay and long hours of work are among the chief conditions of its existence."[1] Into the conditions of women workers in this branch of industry—which, however, is by no means confined to women—the Women's Industrial Council made an investigation, published in 1897.[2] Two inquiries were also

[1] A. Aftalion, "Le developpement de la fabrique et le travail à domicile dans les industries de l'habillement." Paris. Librairie du recueil J. B. Sirey et du Journal du Palais.

[2] "Home Industries of Women in London." Report of an Inquiry in thirty-five trades.

made by Miss Irwin, in Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Council for Women's Trades; and particulars as to the home-work of women in Birmingham appear in *Women's Work and Wages*.[1] All these records exhibit much the same features: unremitting toil, a high degree of mechanical speed and accuracy, and at the same time the lowest standard of workmanship that will pass muster; above all, a cruelly heavy burden resting on the shoulders of the woman who tries to be at the same time mother, housekeeper, and bread-winner, and who in return for her endless exertion seldom receives enough even to keep her properly fed, and never enough to satisfy her own very modest standard of comfort.

The investigators of the Women's Industrial Council visited personally nearly four hundred workers. Perhaps the very poorest trade investigated was match-box making, which, for the last fifteen years at least, has occupied some hundreds of workers in East London alone. The women fetch out from the factory or the middlewoman's, strips of notched wood, packets of coloured paper and sandpaper, and

[1] "Women's Work and Wages." A phase of life in an industrial city. By Edward Cadbury, M. Cécile Matheson and George Shann, M.A.

printed wrappers; they carry back large but light bundles of boxes, tied up in packets of two dozen. Inside their rooms the boxes, made and unmade and half-made, cover the floor and fill up the lack of furniture. I have seen a room containing only an old bedstead in the very last stage of dirt and dilapidation, a table, and two deal boxes for seats. The floor and the window-sill were rosy with magenta match-boxes, while everything else, including the boards of the floor, the woodwork of the room and the coverings of the bed, was of the dark grey of ingrained dust and dirt. At first sight it is a pretty enough spectacle to see a match-box made; one motion of the hands bends into shape the notched frame of the case, another surrounds it with the ready-pasted strip of printed wrapper, which, by long practice, is fitted instantly without a wrinkle, then the sandpaper or the phosphorus-paper, pasted ready beforehand, is applied and pressed on so that it sticks fast. A pretty high average of neatness and finish is demanded by most employers, and readers who will pass their match-boxes in review will seldom find a wrinkle or a loose corner of paper. The finished case is thrown upon the floor; the long narrow strip

which is to form the frame of the drawer is laid upon the bright strip of ready-pasted paper, then bent together and joined by an overlapping bit of the paper; the edges of paper below are bent flat, the ready-cut bottom is dropped in and pressed down, and before the fingers are withdrawn they fold over the upper edges of the paper inside the top. Now the drawer, too, is cast on the floor to dry. All this, besides the preliminary pasting of wrapper, coloured paper and sand-paper, had to be done 144 times for 2½d.; and even this is not all, for every drawer and case have to be fitted together and the packets tied up with hemp. Nor is the work done then, for paste has to be made before it can be used, and boxes, when they are ready, have to be carried to the factory. Let any reader, however deft, however nimble-fingered, consider how many hundred times a day he or she could manage to perform all these minute operations. But practice gives speed, especially when stimulated by the risk of starvation.

The conditions of life secured in return for this continuous and monotonous toil are such as might well make death appear preferable. The poor dwelling—already probably overcrowded—is yet further crowded with match-

boxes, a couple of gross of which, in separated pieces, occupy a considerable space. If the weather be at all damp, as English weather often is, even in summer, there must be a fire kept up, or the paste will not dry; and fire, paste, and hemp must all be paid for out of the worker's pocket. From her working time, too, or from that of her child messenger, must be deducted the time lost in fetching and carrying back work, and, too often, in being kept waiting for it before it is given out. The history of one matchbox-making family visited by a representative of the Women's Industrial Council may be given in detail, since no single member survives.

The Jarvis household consisted of a father, mother, and nine children. They lived in an alley some fifty yards long and very narrow, entered through a row of posts from a street that runs northward from Whitechapel Road. Mr Booth's "Poverty" map shows it coloured with the dark blue that signifies "Very poor, casual. Chronic want." The houses in it, of which there were not many, were and are four-roomed cottages of two floors, and the Jarvis family occupied the upper floor of No. 9. Below them lived a young man with his wife and their baby, his mother, and three

sisters; sixteen persons thus inhabiting the four rooms. All these people seem to have been industrious and respectable. Mr Jarvis, who had poor health, worked in the last summer of his life at matchbox-stamping, and earned "sometimes" 16s. a week. His wife worked constantly at matchbox-making, two of the girls nearly all day, and two of the boys out of school hours. The journey to and from the factory took from an hour to an hour and a half. In the beginning of the winter of 1897 the father fell ill, and had to go into the infirmary. The mother and the children remained at home, and the combined earnings of Mrs Jarvis and her four young helpers produced from 10d. to 1s. a day. It was at this time that the investigator of the Women's Industrial Council paid her visit, and she notes in the brief space for "Remarks": "This house was very poor and bare. . . . Family is often nearly starving."

At about half-past six on the morning after Christmas Day—a Sunday morning, when it was freezing hard and when there was a thick fog, the young man who lived on the ground floor awoke and got up to make tea for his wife. He found smoke in the room, and when he opened the door of the room in which his

mother and sisters were sleeping, a burst of smoke met him. He succeeded in getting out his own family—in their nightdresses—sent a neighbour to call the fire engine, and tried in vain, as did a next door neighbour, to arouse the Jarvises. The firemen arrived within a very few minutes—three minutes, indeed, from the time of their summons—but the house was already in a blaze, the windows gone and the roof fallen in. The engine could not get through the posts at the entry of the court, but while it was being taken round to the back, a ladder was carried in, and a fireman bravely attempted to enter the burning house. But it was too late; all ten were already dead. All had, it was believed, been suffocated before the first call of their neighbour from below. The children had probably passed out of life without warning, but the mother was found lying on the floor, with her baby of seven months old in her arms, its body so protected by hers as to be scarcely burned at all. The father died next day in the infirmary, without having learned what fate had overtaken his wife and children; and their poor neighbours—for whom the weeks after Christmas are the leanest of the year—raised a subscription to defray the funeral

expenses of the eleven, who were buried together.

In all but its tragically sudden close the history of the Jarvis family is the history of scores of East End households. In some there is a husband in intermittent work; in some the mother is widowed; in all the children, if children there are, help; in all the human beings are slaves of the matchbox. The nine years since that December morning have brought no change, unless it be that, impossible though it would have appeared, pay has rather decreased than advanced, and that a recent investigation, not yet completed, seems to reveal a higher proportion of workers in receipt of out-relief.

Such matchbox makers, if they worked at the same rates in the factory during the far shorter hours permitted by the Factory Acts, would earn no less than they do now, for they would no longer waste time in putting together box and drawer—whereby at present some other worker also wastes time in separating them again before they can be filled—and the employer would pay for paste and drying. That, indeed, is really the reason why they are working at home.

But although match-boxmaking is among

the poorest of trades, there are others but a shade better. The wages of shirtmaking, for instance, are often extremely low, and are yet further reduced by the fact that the home-worker provides cotton for sewing. I remember seeing, seventeen years ago, a young deserted wife who was trying to support herself and two young children by making shirts. These were flannel shirts of a fair quality, and were handed to her cut out. She did not sew on buttons nor make button holes; but except for these items made the shirt throughout, by machine, and put in a square of lining at the back of the neck. She was paid 1s. 2d. a dozen, and bought the cotton herself. She could make in a week "five dozen all but one"; for which the payment would be five shillings, eightpence and a fraction of a penny, less the cost of cotton, machine needles, oil, and perhaps hire of machine.

At the *Daily News* Exhibition of Sweated Industries was to be seen an elderly Scotch woman cutting and making shirts from the first stitch to the last, who was a singularly intelligent, skilful, and industrious worker. For varying styles of shirts she received from 9½d. to 1s. 9½d. per dozen. "For the shirts paid at 1s. 9½d. per dozen the following work

is required :—Make and line yoke and bottom bands, put in four gussets, hem skirts, run and fell side seams, make sleeves and put them in. . . . The shirts paid at 9d. per dozen require her to hem necks, button-stitch two stud holes, sew on six buttons and clip threads from all seams. The shirts at 1s. per dozen have two rows of feather stitching, six button holes, eight buttons, four seams bridged and eight fastenings made." [1]

The better sorts of these shirts were such as are worn, not by poor, but by well-to-do purchasers.

"Paper-bag making," says the Factory Inspectors' Report for 1905, "is an industry largely carried on in homes in Glasgow, and no trade is more disturbing to the home. The paste seems to find its way everywhere, and many more things than the bags are found firmly pasted together. I visited two women, who, working usually in workshops, were, during the enforced period of absence owing to the birth of a child, given employment as outworkers. Nothing could exceed the misery and squalor amongst which the work was done. In both cases the workroom was also the living room and bedroom, and the whole of the avail-

[1] Handbook to the Exhibition, p. 139.

able furniture, including the bed, was covered with damp bags, some hundreds of which had to be removed in one home before I could be shown the baby. The surroundings were unpleasant ones for making bags destined to hold pastry." (p. 322.) Of another woman it is reported that "she personally took out work until the day before her child's birth, and found the load of bags which had to be carried downstairs and upstairs very heavy and tiring. This work is poorly paid. Bags, by no means of the smallest size, are made for 3d. to 5d. a thousand, so that it is indeed a heavy weight which has to be carried for the daily shilling." (p. 320.)

Although the cases quoted hitherto are those of women, and although the very worst instances of underpayment invariably occur among women, it must not be supposed that all home workers are women. In the nail and chain making districts many men as well as women work at forges in their own backyards; and even in London there is quite a small population of home-working tailors, shoemakers, and cabinetmakers, to say nothing of men who make toys and trifles of various sorts for hawking in the streets.

In one afternoon last summer I was taken to

visit some men working in their own homes, all within a very short distance. Two were toy makers, two manufactured pipes, and another cages for parrots; one was a shoemaker, and the last was the most skilled handweaver in London. One toy maker was engaged upon wooden hoops with handles and beaded spokes, for South Africa. He also made wooden engines, finding all the materials, iron wheels included, and for these he was paid 22s. a gross. The selling price is sixpence each. In his workshop, too, were to be seen attractive little waggons with sacks in them; and horses of that archaic type which has a barrel body, straight legs, and harness of red and blue paper. The other toy maker was making little go-carts adapted to the use of good-sized dolls. All the material was found by the maker, and the price received by him varied from 3s. 3d. to 6s. 6d. a dozen, according to size. Here again iron wheels had to be provided. In both these cases the wife and some other member of the family helped. The pipes were roughly shaped by hand, then pressed in a mould, the seam scraped smooth, and the pipes stacked in great clay pans and fired in an oven. They are not made to order, but sold by the maker to private customers—

generally publicans—at 2s. 6d. or 3s. a gross. The cage maker, a consumptive man, transforms bands of tin and thick wires into domed cages, with a speed and dexterity amazing to the beholder. I have mislaid my note of the prices paid for this skilful work, but I know that they were horribly low. The elderly shoemaker and his wife—interesting, intelligent people—were full of family cares and of curious industrial reminiscences. They are now on a dry bank, as it were, a foot or two above the deep waters of hopeless struggle, in which the Jarvises, their neighbours, were immersed. The weaver was a survivor from another period, and a child of another race. Face and name alike proclaim him a descendant of the Huguenots; and not only is he a weaver of silk, but also one of the very, very few hand weavers of velvet still left in our country. The coronation robe of King Edward—perhaps the finest velvet ever woven, was his handiwork.

Moreover, a little remnant is still left of the old silk-weaving trade that came to Spitalfields and Bethnal Green when Louis XIV. was so ill advised as to revoke the Edict of Nantes. Instances of man and wife working at home together appear in the Report of the

Factory Inspectors. "Husband and wife, with two children, occupy one room only. The wife weaves, while her husband is occupied in 'finishing' canvas boots in the same room." "Husband, wife, and six children occupy the workroom (which contains two looms) and an attic." "In the weaving room are three low beds *under* the looms, in which three adults sleep. They cannot sit upright in bed, as they knock against and injure the warp." (p. 322.)

Racquet balls are articles bought mainly by persons in prosperous circumstances, few of whom would desire that women engaged in making their tools of play should receive less than a living wage. Yet the rates of pay are such that probably no coverer of racquet balls ever subsisted without aid from other sources. The cores or centres of these balls are made of shreds of rag, much compressed, and covered with strands of wool. These are prepared in the factory, but the covering is done by women working at home. The coverer receives a gross of cores, together with a gross of squares of white leather and a skein or skeins of a special thread. The squares of leather must be damped between wet cloths. Laying one of these damp squares on her left

palm, the worker places upon it the core, "pulls the skin tightly over it, pares off with a pair of sharp scissors any superfluous leather, and sews together with neat regular stitches the edges at their meeting-places. While still damp the ball must be rolled, so as to smooth down any projection of the seam. This rolling is best effected between two slabs of marble, the upper one of which need be only a little larger than the ball. Considerable pressure is necessary, but in the hands of a practised worker the process is a quick one. These slabs of marble are not provided by the employer, and many women roll their balls between two plates; to do this takes rather longer, because the plate will not bear so much pressure as the slab. The scissors also have to be provided and kept sharp by the worker." For covering a gross of the smallest sized balls (sold retail at 2d. or 3d.), the usual payment is 2s. per gross; but there is one prosperous employer who still pays only 1s. 10d. Working steadily for eleven to twelve hours a day, a superior young woman known to me who covered balls before her marriage used to earn about 5s. a week. She was quick and skilful, but obviously ill-nourished, and an accidental sprain, from

which a girl in good health would quickly have recovered, developed in her case into an ulcer, in consequence, said the doctor who saw her, of her anæmic condition.

Ill-health, indeed, is the chronic state of the woman home worker. She misses that regular daily journey to and from her work-place which ensures to the factory worker at least a daily modicum of air and exercise; and she misses also that element of changed scene and varied human intercourse which makes for health and happiness. If she depends upon her own exertions she will inevitably be ill fed and ill clothed; and this is probably one reason for the fact, noted both by the investigators of the Women's Industrial Council and by Miss Irwin, that the woman who is self-supported often earns less, even at the same rates of pay, than the woman who is comfortably married. The half-starved and apathetic human creature cannot maintain a high output of work; and even the out-relief which is so frequent a factor in the income of the widowed or single home worker, seldom suffices to keep her in more than a half-starved condition. Her work grows, like herself, poorer and poorer; and the employer thereupon declares that it is worth no more than its poor price.

From a national point of view it would pay better to save the human machine from falling into that state of disrepair wherein it ceases to be profitable.

Tooth brushes, again, are articles purchased by the wealthy even more frequently than by the poor, and so are household brushes of all kinds. Of brushmaking an account was written in 1897 by the late Mrs Hogg,[1] and being still applicable, was printed in the Handbook of the Sweated Industries Exhibition. "The brushes are given out in dozens, ready bored, and the worker supplied with fibre or bristles, as the case may be. Their work consists in selecting the little bundles of bristles from the heap, fastening them securely in the centre with wire, and then, with a sharp pull against the edge of the table, drawing them through the hole. They are kept in position by a wire at the back of the brush, and each row of bristles is trimmed with a large pair of shears fastened to a table-vice. The fingers, though protected by a leather shield, are often badly cut with the slipping of the wire, and the

[1] Mrs F. G. Hogg was one of the most valued members of the Women's Industrial Council. Her ability, judgment, perseverance, and devotion were all admirable, and her early death has left in the memories of those who worked with her a blank that can never be filled up.

constant jerk of the drawing causes a strain to the chest. All the women complain of this. More serious accidents occasionally happen from the shears, which are hard to manipulate, and often beyond the strength of these exhausted, underfed workers. Materials, with the exception of lamp-black for painting the backs of the brushes, are provided by the shop. As lamp-black costs something, and soot can be had for nothing, a concoction of soot and water boiled is often used as a substitute for the more expensive pigment. But the shears are a serious outlay, costing from 18s. to £1, and needing constant sharpening. Many of the drawers, never having been in possession of the capital to buy them, or being forced by hunger to 'put them away,' are obliged to get their trimming done at the shop, at the cost of terrible waste of time and of iniquitous and capricious deductions from the price given for the work. Deductions are also made for short returns of fibre or bristle sweepings, where these have to be returned to the shop. The material is weighed out and weighed in. It is calculated that if the material weighed so much, the clippings or sweepings ought to weigh so much; but the worker is never told *how* much, and has no means of checking the

calculation; yet if the amount is short, she either 'gets the sack' or has to pay for the deficiency. The rate of payment varies with the number of holes and the quality of brush, bristles always commanding a higher rate than fibre. Coarse fibre scrubbing brushes fetch anything from 3½d. to 1s. a dozen. One woman will make brushes with 145 holes for 10d., while another will get 9d. for brushes with only 100. There is no uniformity of payment; it all depends, they tell you, on the shop you work for. . . . The fibre drawers rarely make more than 7s. to 8s. for a week of seventy-two hours. Taking into consideration the various lets and hindrances to which they are subject, and the time wasted at the shop, 6s. would fairly represent the average during the season when it suits the masters to keep them regularly employed. . . . It is only by seeing the homes of the brush drawers that it is possible to realise all that is implied in the carrying on of a trade and of the travesty of family life in one single room, or the misery of these lives of endless toil, where the tragedy which endures on is so much more pitiful than the tragedy to which death brings rest from labour."

Tooth brushes, of which it is estimated that a worker can make four in an hour, are paid

at the rate of 4d. a dozen, and oest hair brushes at 2d. each, or ¾d. for 100 holes.

These examples might be multiplied a hundredfold. Blouse makers (receiving from 1s. 6d. a dozen), underclothing makers, trouser finishers (from 2½d. a pair), sack makers (at 8d. or 9d. for a "turn" of 12, 15, or 18), makers of boot boxes (at 1s. 4d. a gross), of soap boxes and tack boxes, makers of baby clothes and of children's shoes, finishers of woollen gloves, tassel makers, umbrella coverers, artificial flower makers, forgers of chains and strikers of nails, carders of buttons (at 3s. per 100 gross), and of hooks and eyes (at 8d. and 9d. per 24 gross), cappers of safety pins (at 1s. 6d. per 100 gross)—all of these are busy among us hour after hour, and day after day, for seven days a week, and are receiving in return a remuneration ranging from ¾d. to 2d. per hour. Their work, in some shape or form, comes into every house in this country. Our potatoes and our flour are carried in sacks, although not perhaps to our doors; our eggs are sold to us in cardboard boxes; our garments are fastened with buttons or with hooks—or perchance with safety pins; the gentleman's collar and tie and the lady's waist

belt may probably be the handiwork of some half-starved home worker whose life is being shortened by her poverty. Only ignorance can flatter itself—as indeed ignorance is fond of doing—with the idea that none but cheap goods or cheap shops are tainted with sweating. Any person inclining to that opinion is advised to hang about the back doors of leading shops soon after they open in the morning, or just before they close at night, and to observe the furtive figures that pass in and out with bundles. The taint is everywhere; there is no dweller in this country, however well-intentioned, who can declare with certainty that he has no share in this oppression of the poorest and most helpless among his compatriots.

CHAPTER II

WORKERS IN FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS

Wherein factory workers are better off than home workers—Life on five to ten shillings a week—Health—Ancillary processes—Paper bags—Packers—Case of a cocoa filler—Of a cartridge filler—Jam fillers—Pay sheets of confectionery workers—Observations of an uninstructed observer—Slack times—Long hours—Some cases—"Emergency" processes—Discomforts—Some cases—Danger of fire—Lead poisoning—Instances—Washing appliances—Extremes of temperature—Fines and deductions—Divergent views of two employers upon fines—"Earned too much"—Summary.

THE poorer class of workers in factories and workshops are financially little better off—if, indeed, better off at all—than the poorer sort of home workers; but they have some other advantages. Their hours and conditions are in some degree regulated, and at least some degree of change and variety enters into their lives. But for them too existence is a hard battle. Upon a wage of from five to ten shillings a week life cannot but be narrow and stinted. Food, clothing, and lodging must all be of the poorest; an omnibus fare, a half-penny newspaper, a penny stamp are luxuries in which

only the thriftless indulge; and good health, as the middle class man or woman knows it, is a treasure seldom enjoyed. There is, indeed, no fact more painfully forced upon the middle class observer who becomes intimately acquainted with ill-paid workers than the frequency with which they succumb to ailments that would be regarded in the observer's own circle as trifling. Many girls injure themselves permanently by going to work when they are actually seriously ill. To stay away means loss of pay and possibly loss of employment, so they hold out to the last gasp.

Many of the worst paid workers are engaged in various processes that facilitate buying and selling, rather than in actual manufacture. The paper bags into which a civil shop assistant so obligingly pops our small purchases are given nominally without charge to us, and are bought in very large quantities at a very low rate by the shopkeeper, their real cost being paid in flesh and blood by the women who make them. Some of these women, as appears in the previous chapter, work at home; some, possibly, in well-appointed workshops, but many, as the women factory inspectors truly observe, in the poorest kind of workshop, badly lighted, ventilated, and heated.

To these conditions, no doubt, the weak, inflamed eyes so often seen among the workers are due, at least partly. The workers themselves attribute it to the strain involved in counting over the bags."[1] This remark shows us that the simple and time-saving plan of weighing instead of counting (which is employed for wares so valuable as those of the Royal Mint) is not in use in paper bag manufactories. Packing of various kinds occupies vast numbers of women and girls, most of whom are paid at low rates, by the dozen or the gross, and some of whom attain a celerity almost incredible. No foreman in the world can drive so hard as her own low wage drives the piece-worker who has to support herself and, often enough, to help to support relatives. The most worn-out girl whom I remember ever to have seen was engaged upon no harder task than the packing of cocoa. My attention was called to her, in a room full of girls, by her ghastly appearance. She may have been eighteen or nineteen; she was absolutely colourless, and although there was no sign about her of any specific illness, seemed exhausted literally almost to death. She sat day after day pouring powdered cocoa into

[1] Report of the Chief Inspector, 1905, pp. 297-98.

ready-made square paper packets, of which she then folded down the tops and pasted on the wrappers. She received a halfpenny for every gross. In the week previous to that in which I saw her she had earned 7s. Each shilling represented 24 gross of packets; she had therefore filled, folded and pasted, in the week, 188 gross, or 21,792 packets. Her mother, who was present, said that the drive was killing her and that she must leave. The cocoa was of a brand well known in its day and sold in good shops, but the firm has now, I believe, disappeared. Would that its methods had disappeared with it.[1]

Tea packers and jam fillers often receive wages barely higher. Girls whom I have known personally have been paid at the following rates for filling pots with boiling jam or marmalade: 11 lb. pots (in four trays of thirty-six pots), 2d. per gross; 2 lb. jars (in six trays of twenty-four jars) or 3 lb. jars (in nine trays of sixteen jars), 2½d. per gross. Two girls worked together, and my informant reckoned that the pair could fill a gross of the largest size in

[1] A friend has just sent me a note of a similar case, that of a cartridge filler, who received 1d. for filling 1000 cartridges. She said that she could fill 25,000 a day, when busy. "But," adds my friend, "she is a physical wreck, having worked at this for ten years."

about half an hour. This would bring the wages of each to the comparatively magnificent figure of 2½d. an hour, or over 11s. a week. In some factories these heavy trays have to be lifted and stacked by the girls, the weight of the jars being added to that of the contents.

I was fortunate enough, some years ago, to obtain possession of a number of "pay sheets" showing the wages received in two consecutive weeks by girls employed in a large London confectionery factory. For the first week I had 107 sheets; for the second 98. Five sheets in the first week and ten in the second were left out of my reckoning as probably not representing a full week's work; in each of these the total was below 4s. The highest net payment (there was a deduction for a compulsory sick club) was, in the first week, 15s. 9½d.; in the second, 16s. 1½d. The girls who received these wages (both well known to me) were superior young women of from 22 to 25 years old; both helped to support widowed mothers with younger children. There were, in the first week, 20 girls, and in the second 24, who received from 10s. to 16s., and most of them came much nearer to the lower than to the higher figure. In the first week 78, and in the

second 64, received from 5s. to 10s. (57 out of the 78, and 49 out of the 64 earning less than 8s.); while in the first week 9, and in the second week 10, received from 4s. to 5s. Two-thirds, therefore, of the whole 190 sheets (excluding 15, which showed less than 4s. received) testified to a net weekly wage of less than 10s.—the average being a fraction over 7s. 6d. a week. Yet so easy is it for the inexperienced enquirer to be misled that a lady actually published an account of this very factory, in which she assured the public of wages "rising steadily to 18s. a week," and declared that a girl, "if she ultimately becomes a piece-worker, may make as much as 24s. to 25s. a week." This lady was evidently not aware that piece-work is not a state "ultimately attained," but the usual system throughout the establishment. Nearly all—probably, indeed, every one—of those 190 pay sheets represented piece-work wages. Upon the basis of this illusory wage of 24s. and upwards the writer proceeded to compare the payment of confectionery "hands" with that of High School mistresses, forgetting, however, to compare the hours of a school with those of a factory, or to deduct those slack seasons to which the confectionery trade is so sadly

liable. A High School mistress, moreover, works forty weeks in the year and is paid by the year; a confectionery worker often works for less than forty weeks in the year, and since she is paid by the week her blank weeks are blank to her exchequer, so that even if she did earn £1 a week (which she does not) she would not earn £52 a year. Seasonality—the word is so useful that it must be admitted—though it falls one degree less heavily upon the factory worker than upon the worker at home, is to her too a terrible evil. The long "slack times" of the West End tailor or tailoress reduce a wage that looks handsome in a pay sheet of May or June to a very meagre annual income; and many a West End dressmaker who has worked overtime—as often as not without extra pay—through the long hot evenings of the London season finds herself, in January or February, shivering, without work or pay, beside her own empty grate.

Long hours, which are in effect one form of low wages, have been checked by the Factory Acts, but not yet ended. The inspector for West London writes: "The Jew tailor of West London has an idea that seven days a week is not too long to work his hands."[1]

[1] Report of the Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 50.

From Birmingham a case is reported of a Christmas card maker, who had already been cautioned for keeping "female young persons," *i.e.* girls under eighteen, at work till 9 of an evening. He was found to be keeping two women and a girl at work till 6.15 on Saturday, a day on which work should, by law, end early, and was said to be keeping his hands at work on Sundays also—a privilege which the law allows only to the laundry proprietor. "On the succeeding Sunday," writes the inspector, "the place was inspected, but with difficulty. It was only after considerable delay that admittance was obtained, and then, although the place had every appearance that work had been going on, no females were found. The upper parts of the premises were in use as residence, and I had reason to think that women had been sent up there upon my arrival, but the occupier would not allow me to go up. It has subsequently been admitted that eight women and two female young persons were at work and hidden as suspected."[1]

That such cases would be not the exception, but the rule, if there were no legal prohibition and no fear of fines, may be judged by the state of things actually existing in laundries,

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 99.

where, although the law allows the monstrous stretch of 14 consecutive hours of work, the permitted hours are frequently exceeded. The report of the lady inspectors contains a significant paragraph on this subject. "The hours worked in London laundries by women and girls," says Miss Vines, "seem to be increasing in length, and to be more excessive than ever. . . . The firm I prosecuted in February had employed several young women, one of them only 17 years of age, for 28 consecutive hours, from 8 A.M. on Friday till 12, mid-day, on Saturday; while their hours, including meals on the previous days of the week, had numbered 14 on Thursday, 12 on Wednesday and Tuesday, and 11 on Monday. The 28 hours' period included 2½ hours' interval during the night, when the girls were permitted to lie on the floor of the calendar-room with their coats for pillows 'for a rest!' I prosecuted the other firm twice in June, and on the second occasion it was proved at the hearing of the case that an ironer had been employed for 37 consecutive hours, including meal times and short breaks, and another, an ironer and calendar worker, 32½ hours . . . 14 days previously I had taken proceedings against the same firm. . . .

It was then proved that, in one week, a young packer had been employed by them, exclusive of meal hours and absence of work, for 73½ hours; and two girls, aged respectively 16 and 17, for 68½ hours."[1]

Very similar results ensue in the jam-making industry, where, on the pretext of emergency, the law permits the working of prolonged hours. "In more than one case," writes the inspector, "I have found emergency created by the simple expedient of allowing fruit to lie untouched at the factory till the close of the normal working day, when workers from all departments were turned on to it."[2]

It must be remembered that, in the case of workers paid by the day, as is usual in dress-making establishments, and in some departments of laundry work, there is frequently no extra payment made for overtime. I have indeed heard a West-End working woman declare that overtime would cease if the law made payment for it compulsory; and although that assertion was much too sweeping, the experience of strong trade unions shows that when employers are compelled to pay at a higher rate for overtime, that necessity for

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 300.
[2] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 302.

overtime of which so much is heard whenever the Factory Acts are under discussion, does diminish in a very remarkable manner. Meanwhile, the law does its best to make undue hours of work costly by prosecuting persistent offenders. In 1905 the fines inflicted in the North-Western district of England alone, for illegal overtime, amounted to no less than £728, 4s. 0d., and the accompanying costs to £627, 16s. 0d.; and this in spite of the fact that magistrates in certain localities are decidedly hostile, and inflict derisory penalties. When we further reflect that the North-Western district contains both a large number of highly-organised workers, ready to complain of any breach of law, and also a large number of exceedingly enlightened employers who believe long hours to be inimical to their own true interests, we may fairly infer that there are other districts in which things are considerably worse, and in which the inspectors, zealous though they are, fail to discover all or nearly all the offenders.

Sanitary conditions are still sometimes far from satisfactory, although greatly bettered of late years. There is perhaps no point upon which the influence of women inspectors has been more beneficial. A case is reported

to me, by a most trustworthy witness, of a box-factory, where "women and men worked together in a room in which was the lavatory, with seldom a flush of water." The same witness reports another case, in a rope factory employing both men and women, the details of which are so repulsive, that it is impossible I should print them.

Nor are long hours and under-payment the only ills from which factory workers suffer. In spite of laws and of inspectors, dangers and discomforts are still prevalent in many work-places—especially in those where workers are ill-paid. Many instances may be gathered from a single year's Report of the factory inspectors; and of course the inspectors neither discover all the instances nor print all that they discover. Looking into the Report for 1905, we find, on p. 13, an account from Southampton of the tea-room "provided by a high-class dressmaker employing about 60 females." This apartment was "underground with concrete floor and walls and the ceiling only 6 feet high, with no ventilation and no natural light." Not a few women employed by West-End firms may be found at the present day, not only eating, but also working, by artificial light, in basement-rooms

that are little better than cellars, or in cramped upper rooms, from which there would be little hope of escape in case of fire. The law, in its wisdom, does not require a special fire escape except in places where as many as 40 persons are at work; and certain frugal employers are careful, therefore, to employ but 39. "In one such workshop," writes Miss Squire, "the condition of the 39 women working there seemed one of grave danger; it is a large new rag sorting warehouse, so filled with bales that only narrow passages down which one person can pass are left. On the second floor the women rag sorters work, their tables ranged along a sort of gallery . . . the centre of the building being open for the hoisting of bales; the only means of exit is a narrow wooden staircase with open treads, at one end of the spacious floor. Were a fire to break out below, all exit would be cut off very quickly. In this case the local authority reply they have no bye-laws, and can do nothing, as less than 40 persons are employed." [1]

Another case is reported on the same page, in which a building originally meant for offices

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 290.

only has been turned into a factory and warehouses. "There is no second staircase and no exit on to the roof, which is higher than the adjoining houses. . . . The third floor is occupied . . . by a blouse manufacturer employing between 50 and 60 women. On the top floor there is a lace warehouse where 15 women are employed finishing laces and veilings; a large amount of light inflammable material is stored on both these floors; there are no fire buckets or any means kept for extinguishing fire." Miss Squire sent a notice to the Corporation about this building; and the Corporation replied that it "did not see its way to making any recommendations owing to the impossibility of providing an outside staircase." Miss Squire and the City Surveyor in vain pointed out how an exit could be provided; six months later nothing had been done, and, on again approaching the Corporation, she found that authority "of opinion that no additional means of escape can be provided at a reasonable expense." "The chief officer of the Fire Brigade told me he has himself reported this building as unsafe to the Corporation years ago in vain." From Bristol, Mr Pendlock reports a case of a clothing factory "employing about 50

females." "The work is carried on, on the third and fourth floors, and these are reached by means of an internal wooden, winding, narrow staircase, always imperfectly lighted on account of its position." The local authority demanded an additional staircase. The owner, on the strength of a decision in a previous appeal case, did nothing. Immediately afterwards the premises were considerably damaged by fire which, fortunately, took place in the meal time when all the workers had left the factory. Since then work has been resumed under unimproved conditions.[1]

None of these are cases of ignorance, or even of carelessness; they are instances of the deliberate disregard, for money's sake, of danger to the lives of fellow creatures.

Scarcely less blameworthy is the criminal negligence shown by some employers in carrying out those precautions prescribed by the law, where, as in the potteries, there is a risk of lead-poisoning. Thus, Miss Vines remarks "how frequently one finds the necessary supply of soap, nail brushes, and towels missing. Yet, when giving instructions as to such irregularities, one is almost invariably

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 34.

met with an attitude of *non possumus*. Over and over again managers defend themselves by the assertion that these things, although provided by them, have been and are constantly stolen by the workers." She goes on to quote the observation of a predecessor: "It is impossible not to believe that if expensive and highly-finished ware disappeared from the factory with the same speed and to the same degree that soap, nail brushes, and towels disappear, steps would be taken to discover the offenders." [1]

In one instance a girl of nineteen, after no more than six weeks' employment at pottery dipping, suffered "acute pains, with weakness and subsequent unconsciousness for several hours." On the premises where she had worked, the inspector found 17 persons engaged in dangerous processes. "Notwithstanding, in the lavatory for their use, which was extremely dirty, there was neither towel nor nail brush, and not more than one tiny piece of soap. Eventually one small and very dirty towel was discovered; this, it was stated, had been taken away by the foreman to dry. . . . There was not a single clean towel in stock or in reserve on the premises, and

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 292.

when I questioned the workers it appeared that this condition of affairs was normal."[1]

Even where no risk of poison occurs, the provision of decent washing appliances would, to most of us, appear an essential part of a civilised factory. Many employers, however, hold a different opinion. The authors of "Women's Work and Wages" write that "regulations against washing are still found in many factories where excellence of work does not depend upon cleanliness of handling. Painters and japanners are generally provided with turpentine, etc., but the rank and file are fortunate if they can get a bucket at the sink, and there do exist places where there is a fine of 6d. for washing."

I remember seeing girls, to the number of 50 or more, packing tea in a large room where an old and grubby sink with one wash bowl and one towel formed the sole provision for washing. Access to this room was gained by one wooden ladder-stair. Yet the manager who exhibited this place to a group of visitors was not only satisfied, but actually boastful. The personal attention of the head of the firm was called to these defects, and I am happy to say both of them have now been remedied.

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 293.

The discomfort formerly undergone in many work-rooms during winter was extreme. Until the law required the maintenance of "a reasonable temperature" (generally interpreted by inspectors as 60 degrees Fahrenheit), a very large proportion of women who worked for West End dressmakers did so in rooms absolutely unwarmed, or warmed only by the gas jets meant for lighting the room. I knew of a shirt factory in East London, which was a wooden edifice erected in a back yard and entirely unprovided with any means of warming, and have known women who worked there during the bitterest days of a particularly cold winter.

On the other hand, some processes of manufacture are generally carried on in overheated workplaces. "The temperature in starch drying stoves," says one inspector, "is the most consistently excessive I have found. . . The manager of one starch works is of opinion that women stand the heat better than men do, but says those whom he employs are all hard drinkers; no temperate woman will stay.[1]

Some processes also of lacemaking and of cotton spinning are facilitated by damp heat,

[1] Report of Chief Inspector, 1905, p. 280.

and it can hardly be doubted that, but for the constant vigilance, both of the organised workers and of the inspectors, there would be still, as there were before the law intervened, many working places in which such processes would be carried on without proper ventilation or proper precautions for the health of the workers. Many people now living have seen women and girls come out of a weaving shed that has been kept full of steam, their clothes wet through and presently frozen stiff upon them as they walked home through the cold air.

The plan of reducing wages by fines and deductions is one dear to the low type of employer; and as long as workers remain ill paid and desperately afraid of being out of work, the evil will probably persist to some extent, in spite of increasingly stringent Truck Acts. There are many factories and workrooms in which silence is more or less rigidly enforced, and fines are inflicted for talking or laughing. In many, again, some part of the material used is charged to the worker. I had in my hands, some years ago, 14 or 15 wage books belonging to skilled machinists employed in a provincial stay factory and paid by the piece. The following are the figures

of 3 books for 3 successive weeks. *A* represents the highest, and *C* the lowest sums received.

A	Nominal wage	9/8½	8/-	10/2½
	Deductions .	1/4	9½	1/6
	Wage received	8/4½	7/2½	8/8½
B.	Nominal wage	9/2½	8/6	8/4
	Deductions .	2/2	1/7	1/11
	Wage received	7/0½	6/11	6/5
C.	Nominal wage	5/3½	5/3	5/5
	Deductions . .	1/4	1/9	1/9
	Wage received	3/11	3/5	3/8

These deductions represent mainly material —cotton, and tools—machine needles. Some employers oblige their workers to pay hire for the sewing machines used in the factory, and where these machines are worked by steam, gas, or electricity, a charge varying from a halfpenny to sixpence "for power" is not unusual. I have known instances in which the rent of a factory has been partly—perhaps wholly—defrayed by a charge upon the workers, who had to pay so much a week for their places in it. "Cleaning, as well as rent, is sometimes met in the same way by a weekly charge of 2d. or 3d. for cleaning the workroom. I am assured that one ingenious

employer pays a man 15s. a week for performing this duty in addition to others, while the payments made by the women amount to 30s. In a certain provincial town in a factory which I visited, there was no apparent method of lighting. I was informed that in the winter the women brought their own candles. A local competitor, more acute, provides gas, and charges each girl 3d. a week throughout the dark seasons, at which rate, according to his fellow townsmen, he must make a profit on his gas bill." [1]

In a large box factory deductions were made for glue, for gas to heat the glue, for string to tie the boxes together, and for work books—amounting in all to 1s. 6d. per week.

A charge for hot water to make tea is not unusual, and is sometimes enforced on all workers, the resulting sum, where many are employed, being ridiculously in excess of the cost of the boiling water. One young woman known to me paid this tax (in her case 2d. a week) for six weeks, and never once used the hot water.

[1] The article from which this is an extract was published (in the *New Review*) in September 1891; but the practices described, are, I fear, not yet extinct, though the law is succeeding by degrees in making them risky.

Deductions for spoiled work or alleged damage are those which seem the most to arouse heartburnings and that general feeling of grudge which it is so greatly the interest of an employer to avoid arousing. Where, for instance, glass or earthenware jars are filled with boiling preserve, one or two jars in every few hundreds are sure to crack. "The breakage will probably come to light under the hands of the girl who washes the jar and sticks on the label, and in some factories she is made to pay." I have known a girl charged the full selling price for a seven-pound jar from which the bits of glass were afterwards picked out and the preserve reboiled and sold. Many instances of a similar kind from other trades might be quoted if space allowed.

Other deductions are in the nature of punishment; and of these it may safely be said that the master or foreman who cannot keep order without the use of them does not know his business. One of the best employers and kindest men whom I ever knew said, indignantly, when I asked him whether there were fines in his factory: "If I could not run a factory without fines I should be ashamed to run one at all." My real reason

for the question was that an employer of a very different stamp had within the same week defended himself against an accusation of excessive fining by a public declaration that unless he inflicted fines his factory would be a "bear-garden." The contrast between these two men—carrying on industries not at all dissimilar—between the two factories, and, above all, between the manners, morals, and appearance of the young women working for the one and of those working for the other, formed one of the most instructive object lessons which it has ever been my lot to receive.

Deductions for lateness are sometimes made a source of profit to the employer. Men who pay a penny for an hour's work will sometimes deduct threepence for an hour's absence; and pieceworkers—who, of course, lose pay for the time of absence, are sometimes made to pay in addition. I have seen the wage-book of an umbrella-coverer, which showed that in the course of two years she had paid in fines (to the same employer) nearly £6, chiefly for coming late in the morning. The case was particularly flagrant, because she was a piece-worker, and was not using a power machine, and because work in this workshop was so

irregular that when she did come early she was often kept sitting unoccupied, while, if orders happened to come in of an afternoon, the women were kept late to fulfil them. Thus, although there might be no work for them, they were fined if they came late; being piece-workers, they were paid nothing for the time spent in waiting for work, and they were paid at no extra rate for work done late.

Worst of all, there are factories—though I hope but very few—in which piece-workers, when they have succeeded in making up a total slightly better than usual, are liable to have the surplus deducted. I have in my mind a factory where the foreman frequently deducted 1s. or 2s. from a week's payment, on the ground that the girl who should have received it had "earned too much."

To sum up then: workers in factories and workshops, although they are, on the whole, better off in respect of hours, and although their lives cannot at the worst, be so horribly monotonous as can that of the home worker, are frequently exceedingly ill paid, even in trades demanding considerable skill: not a few of them are employed in places that are uncomfortable, unwholesome, or even actually

dangerous; their poor wages are apt to be docked by irritating fines and deductions; they have no choice as to the companions with whom they spend their days, and they share with the home worker the constant dread of being left without employment and without means to pay for lodging or food. These are the conditions in which hundreds and hundreds of young women in this country are earning what it is customary to call "their living," although all of us are aware that no young woman can really live, in a large town, the life of a civilised human being upon ten shillings a week or less.

CHAPTER III

SHOP ASSISTANTS, CLERKS, WAITRESSES

The daily life of the shop assistant—Her bed-room—"No pictures, photos, etc."—"Anything so left"—The dining-room—Meals—Impossibility of ever being alone—Long hours—Fines and rules—Examples—Some notes on health—Baths—Payment—"Premiums" and "intro" goods—"Taking the book"—Diminished salary with commission on sales—Case of a milliner's assistant—The dictum of a draper—Why not domestic service?—The social grade—Assistants who do not "live in"—Some Scotch cases—Trade expenses of waitresses—Breakages—Clerks and bookkeepers—Salaries offered to a competent young woman—Some shops in fiction—The question of morals.

How many of us, as we sit at ease on the customer's side of the counter, reflect upon the life led by the spruce, black-coated young man or the trim, deft young woman who stands upon the other? For myself, the elaborate hairdressing of the shop-girl—all those curls and waves and puffs that represent so much care and time—always sets me thinking of the same girl before her looking-glass (taking her turn, probably, with others). The dormitory in which she occupies a place is bare and unhomelike, all the beds, chairs,

and chests of drawers of the same pattern; the walls unadorned, for the decoration of them is forbidden. As the rule of one large establishment says, with equal harshness and bad grammar: "No pictures, photos, etc., allowed to disfigure the walls. Any one so doing will be charged with the repairs." The room is chill in winter and stuffy at all seasons, and her companions are chosen by chance. Amid such surroundings she combs and rolls and twists with the skill of a practised lady's maid, in preparation, not for an evening's gaiety, but for a day's toil. Hastily she crams into the small chest of drawers which is her sole receptacle all her little apparatus of brush and comb and curlers and wavers. For what says the rule? "Brushes, bottles, etc., must not be left about in the room, but put away in the drawers. Anything so left will be considered done for." Carefully dressed as to the head, but very inadequately washed—for baths are too often lacking and hot water seldom provided in the mornings—the young lady hurries down to breakfast in a dining-room which has the same impersonal, depressing character as the dormitory. Too often it is a basement room, and sometimes infested by

black beetles. Here, among a crowd of companions, she takes her meal, consisting in the great majority of cases, of bread and butter and weak tea.

Twenty or twenty-five minutes later the assistant must be in the shop, where, again among a crowd of fellow-workers, she remains till the midday dinner time. In many, indeed in most, shops the space behind the counter is too narrow, and the assistant is jostled every time another passes her. To a tired woman with aching back and feet the repetition of this discomfort grows, towards the end of the day, almost intolerable. The work itself is sometimes by no means light; in some departments the boxes that have to be lifted down from high "fixtures" are of considerable weight; the exhibiting of such things as mantles or coats and skirts involves much carrying to and fro of heavy garments; so that a young woman may well be physically exhausted by closing time. Nervously exhausted she will surely be if the day has been busy, for the whole of her occupation is a strain upon the nerves. She has to confront strangers all day long; to touch without damaging numbers of articles, often of a delicate kind; to fill up a number of forms, the omission of any

one of which will bring upon her reproof and probably a fine. She is never alone. She eats her dinner to an accompaniment of clatter and chatter in the same dull dining-room where she breakfasted. In many shops that meal is neither good nor sufficient; and even if good the food is monotonous. Each day of the week has generally its appointed bill of fare. "In many houses the assistants know what the dinner will be to-morrow, to-morrow week, to-morrow month, to-morrow year. I have an Islington shop in my mind where the menu for years past has been this:—

Sunday: Pork.
Monday: Beef, hot.
Tuesday: Beef, cold.
Wednesday: Mutton, hot.
Thursday: Mutton, cold.
Friday: Beef, hot.
Saturday: Beef, cold, and resurrection pie.

On Thursday there is a roly-poly pudding, or stewed fruit densely thickened with sago.

At a large Clapham house the week is mapped out thus:—

Monday: Mutton, hot.
Tuesday: Beef, hot.

Wednesday: Mutton, hot.
Thursday: Beef, cold.
Friday: Fish.
Saturday: Beef."[1]

These meals are often supplemented by private purchases; in some houses the cook is allowed to supply extras at a price; in others the assistants may bring in food; in yet others there is a refreshment bar at which they may and do purchase food. In some establishments they are actually fined for leaving any food on the plate.

From dinner the shop assistant returns, generally after a bare half-hour, to the counter. An extra interval of even ten minutes to be passed in rest and solitude would be precious, and even the institution-like dormitory would be a welcome refuge. But, no; rare indeed is the "house of business" in which the assistant is allowed to enter his or her own bedroom during the day, except by special permission from the shopwalker.

For tea, which affords a welcome break at about five o'clock, a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes will, as a rule, be allotted,

[1] "Life in the Shop." A series of articles reprinted from the *Daily Chronicle*, pp. 5 and 6.

and the meal will in most cases consist of tea and ready-cut bread and butter. After tea work will go on again till closing time. That happy hour varies enormously according to the locality and nature of the shop. In the West End of London most shops are closed by seven, and on Saturdays by two; but in poorer districts shops will habitually be kept open until 9.30, and on Saturdays until much later.

When the shop has been cleared of customers the business of tidying up and covering in for the night begins. After that comes supper, rather a Spartan meal as a rule; and then—then, the assistant is free till 11 P.M., or on Saturdays till 12. Fifteen minutes after that hour the gas of the firm is turned out, and no private light must be kept burning. "Any one having a light after that time will be discharged." The "young lady" may now sleep, if she can, in her narrow bed, with her companions around her, until the morning's bell calls her to rise, wash and dress —still not alone—and begin another day like the last.

In lower-class shops the assistant does not always have even her bed to herself, and has, of course, no choice as to the companion who

shares it. In such shops, where the hours are long, many young women never, except on Sundays or holidays, go out of doors in the daylight. What wonder that they grow anæmic, that they suffer continually from headaches and indigestion and from all the long train of woes that lie in wait for the overworked, under-fed, and shut-in women.

In the matter of hours, of food, and of restrictions, young men are no better off than young women. They also are subject to fines for every petty error, and to a code of rules covering every detail of life and work. I have inspected several such codes, and very curious reading I have found them. I do not remember any instance in which the number of rules was less than 50. Mr Whiteley's, at the time when I saw them, were 159; those of another shop in the same district ran up to 198. Here are a few sample rules, taken almost at random: "Young men coming to business with dirty boots, soiled shirts or collars, etc., and young ladies with soiled collars or cuffs, or otherwise appearing in business in an untidy manner, fine 3d." Of course the washing of these immaculate collars cuffs, and shirts is paid for by the wearer "Gossiping, standing in groups, or lounging

about in an unbusinesslike manner, fine 3d." "Assistants must introduce at least two articles to each customer, fine 2d." "Unnecessary talking and noise in bedrooms is strictly prohibited, fine 6d." "For losing copy of rules, 2d." "For unbusinesslike conduct, 6d."[1]

It is needless to dwell upon the nagging, ungenerous tone that marks such rules as these. That their harassing character helps towards that collapse of health and nerves which is so frequent among women shop assistants, I feel persuaded; and it is more than probable the abolition of "living-in" with all its accompanying petty annoyances would lead to a marked improvement in the health of the whole class.[2]

[1] The National Union of Shop Assistants, Clerks, and Warehousemen, now growing very powerful, and guided by able, experienced and energetic officials, has of late done much towards inducing employers to abolish or diminish some of their fines.

[2] A peculiarly shocking example of the abuses that may arise from a system of fining was lately brought to my knowledge. It is not recent, and must, I think and hope, be unique. I have found no witness who has ever heard of a similar instance. Of its truth, however, the source from which it comes forbids doubt. These are the facts. In a certain retail shop selling drapery and fancy goods the foreman, whose business it apparently was to collect fines, was required to make up a fixed sum of money from this source every week; and being a man with wife and children, afraid above all things of being left without employment, was accustomed to inflict sufficient fines to

Here are a few notes upon the question of health made by a trustworthy observer at close quarters.[1]

A. "During the fifteen weeks I spent at ——'s, three girls in my department had to leave on account of illness. The department was entered through others, and had no street door. In summer it was so oppressively hot that even customers often complained. Out of the sixteen assistants I worked with, one was anæmic, one had varicose veins, one had a chronic cough, one chronic indigestion; all suffered from lassitude and headache, and four frequently lost their voices through weakness. One of those who left broke down from extreme weakness, and had to give up altogether.

make up this total. Two girls, whose weekly wage of 11s. he had thus reduced, on one occasion, to 4s., took to evil courses; and the foreman when dying (in a hospital) told a lady visitor the circumstances, and said that he felt himself responsible for the downfall of the girls. The lady (an experienced worker in a girls' club) made enquiries, which confirmed the startling tale. She followed up the girls, reclaimed one and put her into respectable employment, but failed with the other and was unable to keep sight of her.

[1] These cases are taken from the reports of an investigator employed some years ago by the Women's Industrial Council. This lady, who was an experienced assistant, spent over two years in passing from shop to shop, remaining long enough in each to obtain complete information as to wages, conditions, food, rules, etc.

Another was the case of varicose veins. A vein burst, and the girl was taken to the hospital, where she was told she must not stand much. She could not give up business, however, and now wears elastic stockings above and below the knee on both legs. Anæmia was common. At my table at dinner there were six persons with the same colourless lips, leaden skins, and hollow eyes. This house compares favourably with most business houses in London."

B. "I very clearly remember some very hot days . . . behind the fancy counter of a West-End house. The atmosphere was filled with fluff and dust, the very board floors seemed to scorch one's feet, and the effort to drag a heavy lace box out of the fixtures made one faint and giddy. One day my companion at the counter gave a little gasp and collapsed on a heap of collar-boxes. The shopwalker carried her out of the shop to the housekeeper's room, and in about half an hour she regained consciousness. In another half hour she was at the counter again. It was only the heat and the standing! That night when we went to bed she showed me her blistered feet and told me they had been very painful during the day. She had been unable to

bathe them for three days, for there had only been enough water in the bedroom for washing in the morning, and she hadn't time to wash her feet then."

C. "Only strong girls can manage to keep a berth in this house for any length of time. Ailments: weakness, anæmia, and fainting attacks, with frequent headaches and other symptoms of a low state of health. Underground dining-room lit with gas; a damp unpleasant room. In summer it is very close and infested with black beetles. The shops are warmed with gas in winter."

D. "The shops of this firm are bitterly cold in winter, as there is no artificial heat. The assistants get thoroughly chilled and are not allowed a fire in the sitting-room unless the weather is exceptionally cold. Sanitary accommodation objectionable."

The hours of work are in some localities very long. I have known of shops in poor districts that remained open on Saturdays till 11, 11.30 or 12; and cases are cited by credible witnesses of 12.30 as the Saturday closing time. Tobacconists' and sweet shops are often open on Sundays, and assistants employed in them are liable to a seven days' week. On the other hand, in shops that are

never open on a Sunday there is often a tendency to discourage the presence of the assistants on the premises during Sundays. It used to be not an uncommon practice actually to turn the assistants out, from closing time on Saturday till Sunday night or Monday morning; but it is a good many years now since I have met with any instance of this. The cruelty and meanness of this form of economy are sufficiently obvious; yet I have known it practised by a draper who was a churchwarden and who was greatly surprised at receiving from his vicar earnest remonstrances upon the subject.

Sad to say, a bath or bathroom is by no means regarded by employers as a necessity. There are still houses of good repute in which the assistants, male and female, have nothing but a basin in which to wash. On the very day that I write these words a letter is published in the *Daily News* from a shop assistant who cites the case of "a large house in the West-End where hundreds of young men and women 'live in,' and not a single bath is provided for them. . . ." When the poor assistant feels inclined to take a bath he has to take it before the public baths close at eight o'clock; and as there is no fire in

the sitting-room he is obliged to go straight to bed to avoid catching cold on a cold winter's night after taking his bath."[1]

The salaries both of men and women are poor. The shop-walker and the buyer may, in some instances, receive handsome salaries; but for the ordinary saleswoman, £35 a year is high pay; indeed, there are many young men receiving no more than £20 or £25. Out of this income the assistant has to keep up the required standard of appearance, providing black coats or gowns, as the case may be, and spotless starched linen. Often the collar and cuffs of the young lady are of a regulation pattern that may perhaps not suit her again if she goes into another house. Towels are not generally included in the furnishing of the bedrooms; the purchase and washing of these come out of the assistant's pocket.

These wages are supposed to be supplemented by "premiums," and the subject of premiums is not without interest for the customer. Certain goods, which for some reason it is particularly desired to sell, are "premiumed," *i.e.* a small commission is given to the assistant who effects a sale of them. The

[1] *Daily News*, 25th August, 1906. Letter signed "Onesimus."

premium, which is in proportion to the selling price, is generally but a small sum. Half-a-crown is about the highest figure, and would represent a purchase running to some pounds. On small things the premium may be as low as a halfpenny. The existence of premiums explains in great measure the annoyance to which all of us have been subjected by the endeavours of an assistant to force upon us goods for which we have not asked—goods known behind the counter as "intro" (or introduced) goods. A rule quoted above shows that there are shops in which an assistant is bound to press two "intro" articles, at least, upon every customer. To dispose largely of "intro" goods is obviously to the assistant's interest, not only because the premiums make a welcome addition to his small income, but also because the disposal of these articles is viewed with favour by his superior officers. To the customer who knows what she wants and is anxious to spend no more than the needful time and money in getting it, "intro" goods are an irritation and a burden—especially if she is sufficiently behind the scenes to know their significance to the girl or youth who compulsorily obtrudes them upon her. Such customers are apt to forget the great

commercial truth that shops exist not to supply the needs of the public but to fill the pockets of the shopkeeper.

Nor is the premium the only instrument of pressure applied to the shop assistant. There is, in most establishments, an unwritten law that each assistant must, each week, sell goods to a certain amount. That total goes by the name of the "book"; and each young man and young woman is aware that repeated failure to "take" his or her "book" will be followed by dismissal. One very capable employer has a different method. He engages the assistant at a fixed salary; and when she has been at work for a couple of months, she is informed that for the future her salary will be diminished by a substantial deduction, and that she will receive a commission of 1¼ per cent. upon her sales. The assistants are said not to keep a reckoning of their commission, but to be of opinion that they rather gain than lose. In the "woods" department, where sales would not generally run to high figures, £10 was deducted from the £30 a year of one assistant, and £8 from the £28 of another. From a salary of £35 in the underclothing showroom no less than £23 was taken off.

There are houses in which a list of weekly

"takings" is posted up; and some in which the names that stand low in the list are marked by the employer with signs of disapprobation. To be a good salesman or saleswoman is to be an adept in the art of inducing fellow creatures to make purchases that they did not intend to make. Indeed, there are shops where failure to effect a sale, if it occurs three times running, means dismissal. I knew an instance (a good many years ago) in which a girl was dismissed at a moment's notice from a London millinery shop, because she had failed to cajole a customer into buying any bonnet. She was "living in"; her home was not in London; the dismissal took place between 5 and 6 o'clock, and she did not know of any lodging to which she could go. Fortunately a policeman whom she consulted was able to direct her to one of London's many safe havens for young women. But what of the employer, who, suddenly, and late in the day, turned a young girl out of his house into the unknown world of London, her only fault being that another woman had found in his shop no bonnet to suit her—and had been resolute enough to resist buying one that did not?

It is related of a certain provincial draper that

seeing a customer depart having made no purchase, he called up the assistant who had waited upon her. "Why did not that lady buy anything?" "We hadn't what she wanted, sir." "Anybody can sell people what they want. Remember that I keep you to sell people what they don't want." That in a nutshell is the present condition of retail shopkeeping—especially, perhaps, in the department of drapery; and that condition is one reason why some customers find it preferable to deal at co-operative stores. The business of the assistant in a private shop is to sell, reluctantly perhaps, but under stern compulsion, articles that the shopkeeper desires sold to a customer who does not really desire to buy them. Can any employment be imagined more straining to the nerves, or more trying to the temper of a refined and delicate minded person? And there are many shop assistants of refinement and of delicate feeling; some of them daughters of clergymen and of other professional men who have died leaving their girls unprovided for.

At this point some reader will certainly be found to demand why these young ladies do not, in a body, abandon the shop and enter domestic service. The answer is a simple one

enough. These girls, like the vast majority of their compatriots, will endure much hardship rather than lose caste; and, whatever may be the opinion of the wage-payers, there can be no doubt that among wage-earners domestic service ranks as a low-caste occupation. The middle-class mother who will not send her little girl to a public elementary school, the middle-class father who would rather see his son making a small income as a professional man than a large income as a tradesman, ought rather to applaud than to condemn the "young lady in business" who refuses to exchange her black uniform and her title of "Miss" for the cap and apron and the name without a handle of the domestic servant.

The question of class distinction has, as Mr Charles Booth has pointed out, a marked influence upon the choice of employment; and this influence, the authors of *Women's Work and Wages* truly observe has led to curious economic anomalies, which are generally beneficial to the employers.[1]

An observation somewhat to the same effect may be found on pp. 67, 68 of *Women in the Printing Trades*.[2]

[1] Women's Work and Wages, p. 47, note.

[2] Edited by J. Ramsay MacDonald. P. S. King & Son.

In Scotland "living-in" is not customary, but the advantages of freedom have been, in the past, sometimes counterbalanced by serious drawbacks. Here are some instances from one of Miss Irwin's reports:—

"In some of these shops the girls are kept on duty continuously; this is more especially the case where only one girl is employed. . . . In scarcely any of the shops in this district is lavatory accommodation provided. Witness said she knew of drapery shops where the hours are from 8 A.M. to 9 P.M., and in some cases to 10 P.M.; while they are kept open till 11 P.M. and 12 midnight on Saturdays. In these shops the girls are allowed half an hour off for breakfast and one hour for dinner. Total hours worked per week 82 and 89 (not including meal hours). No seats are provided and there is no sanitary accommodation. Witness stated that there are frequent cases of girls completely breaking down in health in these shops."

"Witness 504 is about 24 years of age. She is saleswoman and manager in a confectioner's shop and is paid 7s. per week. The shop she keeps is an East-end branch belonging to a leading firm in this trade. The shops of this firm in better localities

are closed at 8 P.M. In the other the following are the hours: open 9.30 A.M., close at 10 P.M. Saturdays, open at 8.30 A.M., close at 11 P.M. As witness has sole charge of the shop she cannot leave it to take her meals, or for any other purpose. Her dinner is brought to her and she takes it as she can; tea is taken in the same way. Witness has in all nine holidays in the year."

"Witness 418 had been engaged as an assistant in a tea shop and gave the following evidence: Her hours were from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M., five days in the week; and from 9 A.M. to 11.30 P.M. on Saturdays. Witness had sole charge of the shop and was not allowed to go out for meals, except on such days as her employer, a commercial traveller, and seldom at home, came to relieve her; frequently she was obliged to fast all day, and finally she was obliged to leave on account of her health breaking down. Total hours worked per day, 12; Saturdays, 14½; per week 74½ hours."[1]

In restaurants, both in London and elsewhere, the hours are sometimes excessive. I have known instances of girls who were

[1] Women's Employment in Shops. Report of an enquiry conducted for the National Federal Council of Scotland for Women's Trades; by Margaret Irwin, p. 7.

employed at the refreshment rooms of stations who were not allowed to leave until after the last train had gone at night —which meant that they had to walk home every night after midnight.

Miss Irwin, in her evidence before the Committee of the House of Lords upon the early closing of shops, quotes a very similar instance: "In another baker's shop where six girls were employed, the hours were from 6.45 A.M. to 8 P.M., and to 11.30 on Saturdays. The girls had to provide their own food, and all meals, including breakfast, were made and partaken of on the premises, the girls having the use of the kitchen for this. No regular time was allowed for meals, and they were kept running backwards and forwards to the shop all the time. Very often they were kept beyond the nominal closing hour of 11.15 P.M. and lost the last car home. This was a great hardship to the girls who lived at a distance. My informant said: 'When I get home, I just sit down and cry with fatigue.' The firm have a number of branch shops. There are in all twenty-eight girls employed in them."[1]

[1] Women Shop Assistants. The evidence given by Miss Irwin before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Early Closing of Shops, p. 5.

The nominal maximum hours in restaurants visited by her are given by Miss Irwin as follows :—

"In 3 cases	16	hours on one or more days in the week			96	hours.
„ 1	„	15½	„	„	93	„
„ 1	„	12 to 17	„	„	93	„
„ 1	„	15	„	„	90	„
„ 2	„	16	„	„	87	„
„ 1	„	14½	„	„	87	„
„ 2	„	13 to 14	„	„	79	„
„ 4	„	12½ to 15½	„	„	78	„
„ 1	„	17	„	„	77	„
„ 3	„	12 to 12½	„	„	72 to 75	„
„ 1	„	13	„	„	70	„

"These," adds Miss Irwin, "are the *nominal* hours, but . . . in several cases the information was taken from the women assistants at a later hour than the nominal closing time." [1]

The expenses of a waitress are often considerable; she almost always has to pay for the washing of the aprons, collars and cuffs that are a part of her uniform, and in most cases to provide them. As nearly every company has its different pattern the articles are apt to become useless when employment is changed. Moreover in some restaurants and refreshment-rooms, all breakages, whether made by them or by customers, are paid for by the

[1] Women's Employment in Shops, p. 6.

assistants. I have known girls subject to this deduction who complained that they received no statement as to how the amount deducted was made up. That the sum is in some cases not trifling is shown by a newspaper correspondence that occurred in the year 1890. A representative of Messrs Spiers & Pond, Ltd., wrote to a newspaper complaining that the amounts habitually deducted at Waterloo Station had been overstated, and assigned 1s. 9½d. as the weekly average for each assistant. This being the firm's own estimate, there can be no injustice in quoting it. When we remember that the wages of waitresses average, roughly, from 7s. to 14s. a week, less 8d. or 9d. for washing, we shall probably regard an average deduction of 1s. 9½d. a week as by no means inconsiderable. A certain proportion of breakages is manifestly incidental to the refreshment trade and the renewal of crockery is as much one of its natural expenses as the renewal of fuel. Either of these items might just as fairly be laid upon the waitresses. It is often made a reproach to schemes of industrial partnership that the employees share the profits without sharing the losses. This particular form of partnership, in which employees bear losses

but take no share in gains seems to have escaped the economists.

In the matters of poor pay, uncertainty of employment and compulsorily "respectable" clothing, clerks and book-keepers occupy much the same position as shop assistants; and when their employment happens to be in shops, their hours are equally long. A young woman known to me, a highly competent clerk and book-keeper, showed me letters from employers with whom she was in treaty. In one case she was to be cashier and book-keeper in a very well known and flourishing shop; she was to be at her post until 11 P.M. on Saturdays and until 8 (or it may have been 8.30) on other evenings. Her pay was to be 8s. a week, living out. I may add that shortly afterwards I myself saw this shop open one evening, not Saturday, at nearly 9 o'clock. The other post, again that of cashier and book-keeper, was in the office of an extremely wealthy wholesale City firm, where thousands of pounds would have passed through her hands weekly and where the book-keeping would have been very complex. The salary offered was 14s. a week.

Reviewing this chapter, I see that I have dealt almost exclusively with large establish-

ments. In smaller ones and especially in poor districts the food and housing may be worse, and the payment will almost certainly be lower. On the other hand the regulations will in all likelihood be less rigid and sometimes the relations between employer and employed will be quite human and even homelike.

Of the general conditions in a thoroughly low-class shop, Mr Maxwell's *Vivien* presents a picture faithful probably in most particulars. A more typical case, illuminated by a spark of real genius, is portrayed in Mr Wells's *Kipps*; and there is an admirable vignette in Gissing's *The Odd Women*.

It is only just to add that neither the somewhat exhaustive investigations made under the auspices of the Women's Industrial Council nor such information as, during a considerable course of years, I have been able to collect personally, confirm those accusations of prevalent immorality which might be suggested by such novels as Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, and which are freely made in some quarters. No doubt instances must from time to time occur in which a shopwalker or an employer makes use of his position as a weapon of seduction; but such instances are certainly

the exception. There may also possibly have existed, somewhere, at some time, a basis of fact for that persistent legend of the employer who offers to young women the free use of a latch key by way of compensation for low payment.

For the large majority of shop girls, however, the temptations of shop life take the form not of illicit lovemaking within the shop but rather of continued dulness, driving and discomfort, constantly pressing them towards any offered means of escape. The passion that really prevails in the modern shop is the passion for money, which, no less than more lurid passions preferred by the romance writer, devours the youth and lives of girls. It does not, however, consciously fall under the classification of the decalogue, and the destroyers of these victims often honestly believe themselves to be men of singular righteousness and virtue, the pillars and bulwarks of an industrious, commercial nation. The feudal baron, not improbably regarded himself in no very different light.

Note. The daily papers of the week in which this chapter was written contained two cases that corroborate the statements made in it; and that show the evils described to be by no means matters of the past. I give them verbatim, except that

in the second case I have concealed the name of the accused lad.

George A. Evans, coffee-shop keeper, of Goldsmith's Row, Hackney Road, was summoned at Old Street for breaches of the Shop Hours Act by employing two young persons as waitresses for more than 74 hours in any one week.

Mr D. Carter, for the London County Council, explained that girls under the age of 18 were denominated "young persons," and while they might be worked 12 hours for the first five days of the week, and 14 hours on a Saturday, all meal times were to be counted in as part of the employment.

The defendant was found employing a girl aged 17 years and 7 months, and another 16 years and 2 months, and both had in the week ending May 26th worked 85 hours each. Further, the defendant had no notice of the hours of labour, as allowed by the Act, exhibited in his shop. He was also summoned for that offence

Defendant pleaded guilty, and Mr Dickinson imposed fines and costs amounting to £4, 18s.—*Daily News*, 23rd August 1906.

A well-dressed clerk, named Y. Z., aged 16, was charged at Marylebone with having embezzled £2, 2s. belonging to his employers Ryland & Co., auctioneers of Edgeware Road. His duty was to collect rents, and it was alleged that his defalcations amounted in all to £7, 10s. In extenuation of the offence he pointed out that his wages only came to 12s. a week, out of which he had to pay 4s. rent and 2s. travelling expenses, leaving him but 6s. a week with which to clothe and feed himself. He took the £2, 2s. intending to pay it back, but he was found out before he could do so. His hours were from 9 to 6. Mr Paul Taylor said he was at a loss to know how Z. could have sustained life on the small salary he was receiving. He remanded him to give the missionary an opportunity of seeing what could be done for him.—*Tribune*, 24th August 1906.

CHAPTER IV

TRAFFIC WORKERS

The traffic worker and the public safety—"Privileged cabs"—Railway workers—The hours of signalmen—The seven day week—"Blacklisting"—London's omnibus men—Paying the police for leave to work—"The rest of the evening"—What is required of a driver—What is required of a conductor—Wages stopped for fogs, fires and processions—Curiosities of an "Accident Club"—How a motor man is "passed" for a licence—The "journey system"—What it means to the passenger—What it means to the men—Breakdowns—Wages in the garage—3d. a day for uniform—"The bar up"—The best employer in London—Tram men under the London County Council.

IN these days of much journeying, there is scarcely one of us whose life and safety do not depend, again and again, upon the skill, the steadiness, the nerve and the judgment of the men who steer our public conveyances. Not only in their own interests, therefore, but in the interest of public security, it is essential that the men upon whom rests so vast a responsibility should not be overworked, underpaid nor harassed. The sad fact is, however, that the vast majority of them are both overworked and harassed; and that, if

not the majority, at least a very appreciable minority are decidedly underpaid.

Of cabmen I do not propose to speak; the subject of their hours, conditions and rates of pay being so intricate that anything like a general view is difficult to present. I will content myself with indicating, by means of a paragraph from a Parliamentary Report, the kind of exactions to which cabmen are exposed. "Privileged cabs" are those admitted, upon payment of a fixed charge, to ply in railway stations. It appears that the lowest charge made by any company maintaining the privileged cab system is 1s. per week. The smallest number of cabs is "15, at Clapham Junction, and the largest number of cabs, 290, at Paddington, which at 3s. per week provide the Great Western Railway with the substantial sum of £2262 per annum."[1]

The railway workers of Great Britain are, as a class, men of excellent character, intelligent, careful, attentive and worthy of the trust reposed in them. They have a strong trade union, and their secretary now sits in Parliament. Yet this body of grown men, most of them voters, was so unable to secure from its

[1] Report of Select Committee on the Cabs and Omnibuses Metropolis) Bill, 1906, p. 5; par. 31.

employers a reasonably short working day that the legislature, unwilling though it has always shown itself to any direct regulation of the working hours of men, felt compelled in the interests of public safety, to intervene; and a special order of the Board of Trade has, for many years past, limited the hours of railway men. Yet, even now, there are porters, generally at small stations, who are on duty for 16 hours a day; and 8 hours, which should be the longest day of any signalman, are extended, except in the busiest boxes, to 10 and, in some cases, to 12. Many a porter works seven days a week for 16s., perhaps at some small station where "tips" are infrequent. In this connection it is worthy of note that such companies as pay additionally for Sunday labour find it possible to do with much fewer workers on Sundays. Of how much improvement the railway man's lot is still susceptible may be judged from the programme of the union, drawn up at the close of 1906, and about to be submitted to the various companies. Its demands are as follows:—

An eight-hour day for trainmen, shunters and signalmen.

No railway employée to work more than ten hours a day.

An increase of 2s. per week in the wages of all grades receiving less than 30s. per week.

Sunday labour to be paid for at the rate of time and a half; and overtime at the rate of time and a quarter.[1]

The worst form of oppression, however, to which the railway man is exposed is one very difficult to prove and very easy to deny: "blacklisting." A railway servant, on leaving the employ of one company, (whether at the company's instance or at his own) receives no written character, nor can he refer any intending employer to the report of his immediate superior. Enquiry must be made at headquarters; and it seldom happens that a man who, for whatever cause, has left the service of one company, succeeds in getting taken on by another. The men are convinced that a deliberate understanding exists, and this conviction leads many of them, unwillingly subservient, to endure the ills they have, rather than face loss of employment and of pay. Any trade that is in the hands—as the

[1] As these terms may possibly be unfamiliar to some readers, it may be as well to explain that, on a time and a half rate, every penny of the ordinary wage becomes a penny-halfpenny; and that, on a time and a quarter rate, every such penny becomes a penny-farthing.

railway industry of course is—of comparatively few and very powerful employers is especially liable to develop the tyranny of "blacklisting." The existence of the practice is almost invariably denied, and can, in the nature of things, very seldom be substantiated; but it is possible to remark that, as a matter of experience, one company does not engage the man who has previously worked for another. The men know, experimentally, that to leave their present employers means, in the great majority of cases, leaving the industry altogether. How much such knowledge must sap a man's independence, how much it must try his nerves and his temper, it is, surely, unnecessary to insist.

The railway workers have, in the course of years, conquered the immense difficulties that beset the organising of men whose hours are long and varying, and whose work brings them rather apart than together. Other workers, whose employment is closely akin to theirs, are still involved in those early struggles which seem to the men engaged in them almost hopeless. Comparing their position with that of the railway men, we shall see, once again, how great are the benefits which organisation can bestow, and how powerless are even

skilled and licensed workmen unless backed by a strong union.

The omnibus men of London form a group of workers familiar to all London's citizens. The most tedious of "blocks" has been enlivened for us by their "chaff"; the blackest of fogs and the most scorching of dog-days have failed to destroy their patience and their good temper. With the advent of the motor omnibus, however, a change has become apparent which fills observant Londoners with foreboding. The motor man is, to put it plainly, snappish; he hustles his passengers in and out; he not infrequently turns a blind eye to the breathless pursuer; and he is apt to be caustic in remarks upon the slowness of the aged or the unwieldy traveller. To this impatience the jarring motion and irritating jangle of the car may perhaps contribute; but the main reason of it may, I believe, be found in the conditions under which the drivers and conductors of motor omnibuses mostly work.

It may be of some interest to compare the conditions of three different groups of men, all of whom are busied in the work of carrying London's inhabitants to and fro; especially since their cases exemplify

a transition which is in course of progress around us.

All drivers and conductors are compelled to pay for leave to exercise their calling. It is considered that the security of the passenger requires to be safeguarded, and that no person should be allowed to officiate upon a public conveyance unless he has been licensed to do so. In London the ultimate licensing authority is the Home Secretary, to whom Section 8 of the Stage and Hackney Carriages (Metropolis) Act of 1869 has allowed a power little less than autocratic. These are the terms of it: "A licence to the driver or conductor of a hackney or stage carriage may be granted at such price, on such conditions, be in such form, be subject to revocation or suspension in such events and generally be dealt with in such manner as the said Secretary of State may by order prescribe, subject to this provision, that any licence shall, if not revoked or suspended, be in force for a year, and there shall be paid in respect thereof to the Receiver of the Metropolitan Police Fund such sum not exceeding 5s. as the said Secretary of State may prescribe." Successive Home Secretaries have seen fit to fix the maximum charge of 5s. for each year's licence; and between the 1st of April, 1905 and the 31st

of March, 1906, the Commissioners of Police received as many sums of 5s. as sufficed to make up a total of £7928, 10s.[1]

Of the manner in which the police authorities exercise their power something will appear later on; but, apart from any question of administration, there is surely some injustice in taxing the men for a licence demanded not at all in their interest, but solely in that of their passengers. That the owners of public conveyances, who derive a profit from running them on the public roads, and who in doing so assist to wear out those roads, should pay for a licence may be not inequitable; but that the paid servants of such owners should be taxed, as a condition of entering that service, can hardly, when judicially considered, be pronounced defensible, and it is not surprising that the Select Committee should advise alteration. "The theory of the Home Office," says the Report, "seems to be that, in view of the special benefits derived by the cab and omnibus trade from its connection with the police, it is only fair that the trade should be specially taxed for the maintenance of the police. . . . There seem, however, to be few

[1] Report of Select Committee on the Cabs and Omnibuses (Metropolis) Bill, 1906, p. 4, par. 19.

other classes of the community who are charged in this way for their own police inspection, and in our opinion, the system requires modification."[1]

The drivers and conductors of horse omnibuses (though there have been changes in their conditions) are still employed upon the system which was once the only one in vogue, and are, at least nominally, paid by the day. The length of day varies somewhat on different routes, but the average is about fifteen hours—or very nearly twice the length of the working day in the best managed industries. Moreover, the omnibus man works as a rule thirteen days in a fortnight. His share of leisure is pretty well described by the reply of an elderly driver who, in the hearing of my informant, was asked by a passenger, at something after 11 P.M., whether this was the last journey. "Yes, sir," the man answered mildly, "this is our last journey—and the rest of the evening we have to ourselves."

Out of his nominal daily wage of 7s. or 8s., the driver has to provide rugs, capes and whips. Custom requires of him "tips" to horse-keepers, pullers-up, &c., the total of which is

[1] Report of Select Committee on the Cabs and Omnibuses (Metropolis) Bill, 1906, p. 4, par. 19.

estimated at not far short of a shilling a day. In only a few cases are the men near enough to their homes at dinner-time to be met by a small son or daughter carefully conveying "Father's dinner" in a covered dish or basin—an economy possible to very many cabmen. Their meal, on this account, inevitably costs them rather more than if it could be prepared at home; and the same increase of cost attends their tea. Less than two meals in 15 hours, a man who works in the open air can scarcely do with.

Superhuman punctuality is expected of the omnibus. Should it arrive two or three minutes late—or two or three minutes early—at one of its "points," its driver may be suspended from work for from two to seven days. The conductor, whose nominal wage is 6s. a day, is liable to be suspended, or discharged if his takings fall below the average. When a journey is stopped by fog, fire or the occurrence of a procession, the proportion of pay for that journey is deducted from the wage of driver and conductor alike, even although they may not succeed in bringing the omnibus into the yard until after the usual hour, or even if, as happens occasionally, they may have to stay out all night with it. As one of the fraternity

sardonically remarked to me: "It's a new experience for them, that's all."

At the present moment, the drivers and conductors of horse omnibuses are face to face with the prospect of a lowered wage. On one line, there has been a reduction of one journey *per diem* (the working day having previously been one of 16 hours) and a reduction in the day's pay of 1s. 6d. for the driver (from 8s. to 6s. 6d.) and of 1s. for the conductor. It is fully expected that men on other lines will, before long, experience the same change.

It will, I am sure, surprise many readers to learn that the drivers and conductors of omnibuses are expected to defray the expenses of accidents. The men employed by one large company subscribe to a fund for the purpose of meeting such expenses. I cannot learn that any direct rule obliges them to belong to this so-called "Drivers' and Conductors' Accident Club," but they are of opinion that any man who declined to belong would not find himself, for long, in the employ of the company. I have been fortunate enough to inspect the rules of this club, and have carefully preserved a copy. It is a document equally remarkable for its op-

pressiveness and for its grammar. The preamble runs thus: "This Club . . . is for the purpose of creating a fund by which the expenses so frequently arising from accidental causes may be met without allowing these expenses to fall unjustly upon the company, or subjecting the individuals who may be the immediate cause of such expenses to perilous and embarrassing circumstances, and, be it further understood, that each Driver and Conductor are responsible for all damages to property or person to the amount of Ten Pounds, and any Driver or Conductor not conforming with the Club Rules will not be allowed any assistance from the Funds thereof for any accident they may meet with." Rule 1 requires "Each Driver to pay 2s. entrance fee as soon as he is passed eligible to drive an Omnibus belonging to the Club. Each Conductor to pay 1s. entrance fee. Each Service Driver to pay 1s. per week contribution. Each Service Conductor to pay 6d. per week contribution." Rules 3 and 5 are worth quoting. "Whatever accident may occur by any Driver and Conductor, whether regular or spare men, he shall pay towards such accident not less than one quarter of the amount the accident may cost the

Club to settle. If not able to pay the whole of such fourth in one payment it must be paid by instalments of not less than 2s. 6d. per week. Should it be further proved that such accident was brought about by intoxication or any kind of neglect, the Committee shall, at their next meeting, have power to levy any further sum they agree upon, and, whatever sum fixed, may be paid by weekly instalments by such sums as may be agreed upon by the Committee." "Should any Member of the Club leave or be discharged from the Company's service within three months of his becoming a Member, such Member shall *forfeit all claims upon the Club funds.*" *Rule* 7, after providing for quarterly meetings, proceeds: "The fourth meeting to take place on the most convenient date in December, when after putting away as reserve fund, not less than £40, any surplus remaining to be equally divided among the Members in accordance with what they may be entitled to." Rule 9 is, perhaps, the most remarkable piece of grammatical construction that ever presented itself under the guise of English. "Any Member having left the Club and is indebted thereto shall not be entitled to share, unless all arrears be paid up. Any Member having

left the Club and is entitled to share must apply for same within the first calendar month of the ensuing year, if not his share will be lost and will be placed to the credit of the Club for the ensuing year."

Thus the nominal wage of every driver in this company's service is really reduced by 1s. weekly, and that of every conductor by 6d.; while a fund of "not less than £40," saved up out of these men's earnings, is held in hand to indemnify the company for possible accidents, whether such accidents are caused by the fault of the men or not. The conductor, indeed, can seldom be even remotely responsible for an accident; yet the conductor, no less than the driver, is made to pay this tax. It would be interesting to know whether the law would uphold a man who should refuse to pay anything at all towards the cost of an accident not caused by neglect or misconduct. He would, of course, lose all chance of further employment in the trade; but he might conceivably put an end, once and for all, to these exactions.

It will hardly appear, from all that has been said, that the life of the omnibus man is extraordinarily enviable; yet his situation is decidedly preferable to that of the man who

exchanges the society of a pair of horses for that of a snorting and self-willed motor. Like the horse driver, the motor driver must secure a licence, for which, when he gets it, he must pay 5s. yearly to the Police Commissioners; and if possessing a horse licence he desires to retain it he must pay an additional 5s. per annum. Moreover, when he enters his application, he has also to pay a fee of 5s. to the London County Council for registration. The Commissioners have been known to refuse motor licences to men who have been driving for years, but whose licence shows an endorsement, sometimes of distant date and sometimes for an offence of trivial character. To the lay mind it appears that a man, whose misdemeanours were not too great to make him unfit for driving a horse omnibus, is likely to be a safer driver for a motor than a man from some other calling, quite inexperienced in the art of threading the maze of London traffic. In any case it is clearly an injustice that such a man should not be able to learn, before spending time and money upon special training, that a licence will not be granted to him. The test of competence applied is curious but probably effective. A certain inspector, whose name I refrain from giving, collects a number

of candidates and places himself with one of them on the driving stand of a motor omnibus, the remainder of the candidates occupying seats as passengers. The driver, under orders from the inspector, steers the car hither and thither until such time as his instructor dismisses him to inaction, and selects another. Not until the party has returned home, does any man learn his fate. Then the inspector remarks to each as the case may be: "You have passed," or "You must come up again." The fiat of this gentleman being unchecked, it is well that it appears to be dictated by justice. Beloved, indeed, of his licencees he is not; but I found myself hardly able to sympathise with complaints of his unsmiling disposition. How should a man smile, whose calling in life it is to imperil his existence at the hands of an endless succession of unpractised motor drivers? A certain proportion of these candidates are men who have never driven in the London streets—some of them never on any road whatever. There is a legend of one, said to have been originally a shop assistant, who entered upon his career unaware that he was expected to drive to the left rather than to the right. I have myself travelled in a motor omnibus the driver of

which took the wrong side of three refuges between Maida Vale and Tottenham Court Road. Whether ignorance guided his course or a desire to achieve a full complement of journeys *per diem* I cannot, of course, tell.

Having secured his licence and an engagement, the motor driver is put upon a certain route, to perform a shift, not of so many hours, but of so many journeys. The "journey system," which is responsible for nearly all the ill temper and not a few of the accidents that attend the course of the motor omnibus, is as follows. A certain number of journeys each day is alloted to each car. Driver and conductor are paid by the journey, and the required number of journeys is such that only under the most favourable possible conditions can it be completed. At least one car in every three will fail in the task. Let us consider, for instance, the case of certain cars which, at one period, were timed to do four journeys, but have recently been required to make six in the day. Two shifts are worked, each set of men being supposed to make three journeys. Since the very barest measure of time is allowed, the men are constantly on the strain; they are tempted to take risks, and are unwilling to pause long enough for the

picking up and setting down of passengers. At the close of the period allowed for the first shift, the third journey will in all probability not be finished, but it may have been begun, and will be concluded before the car is brought in. It thus becomes more impossible than ever for the second set of journeys to be compressed into the shortened hours left for the second shift, the rather that the car will very probably have suffered from the strain put upon it in the endeavour to get out of it the utmost amount of work. Two journeys may be achieved, in which case the driver may receive from 4s. to 5s., and the conductor from 3s. to 4s.; or only one may be completed, in which case the payment of each will be but half as much. Is it wonderful that the tempers of men working under such conditions display some uncertainty, nor that accidents are frequent especially in the latter half of the day? The wonder is that so many cautious City gentlemen, who obviously regard their own lives as precious, should continue to entrust their persons to vehicles so precarious.

On some lines, the men work early and late shifts in alternate weeks; on others, they change twice a week. A driver, working on these terms, explained to me how, on a certain

evening in the week, he came off duty about midnight, after which time he had to get home, to get himself clean—no rapid process, as many an amateur motorist well knows—and to get his supper. Soon after six, next morning, he was due at the garage to take on his early shift, and was obliged, therefore, to leave home by about half past five. His next leisure for a meal not arriving until seven hours later, it behoves him to get his breakfast before he sets out. How many hours' rest fall to his share on such occasions, and how fit he is, in the morning, to assume the responsibility of a motor omnibus and its complement of passengers, readers may judge for themselves.

Among other evils arising from this system we may note the way in which every man's hand is turned against his comrade. It becomes the interest of the first shift to snatch time enough for their own journeys, to the loss of the second shift; while the second shift would be more than human if they did not resent the time thus lost. The employing company alone profits by setting up an impossible, or almost impossible, task as the measure of the day's payment. By pretending that three journeys instead of two form the

task of one shift of workers, the payment for each journey can be fixed at one-third instead of at one-half of what may be reckoned as the wage of a man's working day.

From the moment when the car breaks down—and how frequently it does so our own eyes assure us—the payment of its driver and conductor cease. They must remain by the disabled vehicle until a trolley comes to drag it away; their period of waiting may stretch into several hours—it may even extend through the night, but for that part of their time in which they were not actually conveying passengers they will not receive a penny. Some companies have indeed a rule upon their code that payment will be made if the road engineer employed by the firm certifies that the driver is not responsible for the accident. One can understand that certificates, the granting of which means money out of pocket to the company, are not likely to be very lavishly issued by an engineer in the company's employ; and there are men who declare that this rule is a dead letter and that broken journeys are never paid for. Industrially speaking, the history of the motor omnibus industry in London has been unfortunate. One, at least, of the firms that

appeared early in the field followed the tactics rendered familiar by the example of American trusts. It began, as the trust does, by underselling competitors, and offered the passenger a longer journey for a penny. A hope was probably entertained that these low fares would deter the older companies from setting up motor conveyances. The older companies were not deterred; but they found themselves compelled to compete on their rival's terms; so that, for a time, the curious alternative was offered to the Londoner, of travelling from the Marble Arch to Victoria, either in a slow horse omnibus, for 2d., or in a quick motor omnibus for 1d. To travel for 1d. instead of for 2d. is the desire of every passenger; but the gratification may be bought too dear, and danger is a high price to pay. How much danger the passenger incurs, who travels in the motor omnibuses of certain companies may be guessed by persons who have heard—as I have—the drivers of these vehicles talking among themselves of the accidents and of the hairbreadth escapes that have formed part of their own experience. The running into the river of the Barnes omnibus was foretold, less than a week before its occurrence, as a thing that must, sooner or later, come to pass. The

trained men who face them are fully aware what risks they are running; and to some of them, no doubt, the very risk is an attraction. No motor man need complain that modern life lacks incident and adventure. The passenger, on the other hand, who, when he sits behind a horse, can see for himself its weakness or its restiveness, cannot possibly judge the strength or the weakness of machinery that is not even open to his view. Some omnibuses, no doubt, are in excellent condition; but it is equally certain that there are others, the essential parts of which are perilously near to being worn out. Accumulated experience has convinced even so technically unskilled an observer as myself that there is at least one company whose vehicles are not, in themselves, dangerous, and at least one other with whose habitual passengers a prudent life insurance company should have nothing to do. In the hands of an unskilled driver, or of a driver rendered temporarily unskilled by fatigue, by too long a fast, or by too little sleep, every motor omnibus is dangerous; and every hardship of the men thus becomes a source of public danger.

The frequency of breakdowns has un-

doubtedly been increased by the shortsighted policy of some owners who, for economy's sake, have employed in the repairing shop, not qualified engineers, but merely "fitters," or even those humbler persons known as "fitters' mates." The lesson of experience, however, seems to be teaching wisdom in this respect; and the motor companies are learning, as other employers have learned before them, that to entrust costly property to unskilled hands comes expensive, however low the wages paid. Meanwhile, we are informed by the Report of the Select Committee upon the Cabs and Omnibuses (Metropolitan) Bill, that during the period covered by that Report, 25% of the cars were on an average always out of use. This means, of course, that a certain ratio of the men employed upon such cars were always out of a job. Most of these would be set to various kinds of work in the garage, their payment while so employed being but 3s. 6d. a day, a rate representing, for ten hours, less than fourpence an hour. These are truths which should be recollected when persons familiar only with the nominal figure of a wage that can hardly ever be earned, talk of the good pay of motor drivers. Moreover, instances are quoted in

which men have not received even this pittance for the time spent in the garage, but have been paid only for one day instead of for two or three. By one company a notice has been posted up that, from the day upon which these words are written, no work done in the garage will be paid for, unless a certificate has been obtained from the superintendent of the garage.

It may be remarked that this principle of proportional deduction which is so dear to the hearts of the companies is not applied in the matter of the uniform, for which although it never becomes the wearer's property a charge of threepence a day is demanded, even though the day may have been broken and the uniform worn only during an hour or two. A tale is told of a conductor to whom, the car having come to grief early in the shift, fourpence was handed as the fraction of wage to which he was entitled, out of which sum he was requested to hand back threepence in payment for his uniform. He had not presence of mind enough to reduce this charge in proportion to the reduction of his own wages, and to proffer a farthing as the nearest equivalent to one-fifteenth of threepence, but weakly yielded to the demand and went away with a

penny. At threepence a day and 339 days in a year (*i.e.*, deducting 26 Sundays) each man would pay £4, 4s. 3d. for his coat, cap, &c. It would be interesting to know what price is paid for the articles by the company.

Employment in the omnibus trade, whether behind a horse or behind a motor, is thus full of discomforts and of weariness. Yet, such as it is, the men would be thankful for any certainty of retaining it. They are liable to discharge upon any complaint from an inspector (or possibly from an outside person) and no opportunity is allowed of exculpating themselves. Furthermore they are firmly convinced that a number of spies—"spots" is their own slang term—travel to and fro in the character of ordinary passengers and constantly present complaints, ill or well founded as the case may be, to the companies. "There's plenty of people," said one man, "who never pay their omnibus fares. They send in their tickets to the company and get back their money." "Of course," said another, "they must make plenty of complaints or the companies wouldn't think it worth while to keep them on." Whether this belief is right or wrong, its existence is, at least, highly significant of the light in which the men

regard their employers, and is, I venture to say, a symptom of very unsatisfactory relations.

The men are also persuaded that there exists among the Federation of masters a tacit compact in accordance with which a man who has quitted the service of any one of them will not, for a certain length of time, be admitted into that of any other. In their own language "the bar is up" against such a man. How far this opinion is well founded it is difficult to judge; but it is unquestionably the fact that instance after instance can be adduced of drivers, holding unendorsed licences, who, on leaving the employment of one company, have been refused week after week, by the others, and have been obliged at last to find some other calling. One finds himself happier and wealthier as a street sweeper. In at least one such case the responsible post eventually secured is a guarantee of good character and steadiness.

It is always instructive to compare the conditions offered by the best and the worst employers, respectively, in the same trade. In the matter of traffic, the best employer in London is the London County Council. To begin with, the men who work upon its trams

pay nothing for their uniforms. Their working day is of ten hours. Time lost by such hindrances as fog, fire and processions is paid extra (at the rate known to the trade as "time-and-a-half"). Work on a seventh day in the week when it occurs is paid at time-and-a-quarter rates. Moreover any horse driver in the Council's service who desires to qualify as an electric driver can be trained, free of charge, in the municipal technical school; whereas the charge for training made by one of the private companies is £5. Not only does the London County Council issue to its inspectors special instructions to avoid arbitrary and domineering treatment of subordinates; it also affords to every man accused by an inspector the opportunity of meeting his accuser face to face, and of telling his own story. In short, the London County Council treats those deserving citizens who do its work, with justice and with respect; and they, in their turn, treat the public with a degree of kindly courtesy most refreshing after the asperities of the motor omnibus man. Nor can it be maintained by any truthful person that the comparatively comfortable conditions of the municipal tram men have cost the ratepayer too dear; since the profits of the

Southern tramway lines alone in the year 1905 were assessed by the Exchequer for income tax purposes at £203,831; while, in addition to the large profits thus indicated, the reduction of fares on these lines must, by this time, have saved hundreds of pounds to the travelling public.

With the exception, then, of that fortunate minority employed by the municipality, the workers on the public conveyances of London present no very cheering spectacle. In the beginning of this 20th century, and in the capital of a country that prides itself upon the freedom of its citizens and upon the representative character of its government, we find adult skilled male workers, performing valuable public services and occuping positions of great responsibility, apparently as powerless as any sweated homeworker in her garret to secure for themselves either a reasonably short working day, or equitable treatment, or payment for the whole of the hours spent in the employer's service. Yet one group of them is guaranteed by the licence of a public department as efficient; the services which they render are eagerly demanded by the public; their industry is one in which foreign competition is impossible; and the companies

employing them are in many instances paying high dividends. These, surely, are facts very much worth the consideration of all those fellow citizens for whom, in the last resort, the railway man and the omnibus man are working.

CHAPTER V

WAGE-EARNING CHILDREN

Children and home work—Boot making—Box making—All night at match box making—"Can do nearly everything"—A boy tooth brush maker—A boy belt maker—Polishing "spindle legs"—Children and laundry work—Errands—Street sellers—Boys in bakehouses—In brick fields—Girls and heavy trays of jam—Half-timers' heavy loads—Things as they were—Terrors of the early cotton mills—A five year old maker of "blonde net"—Miss Edgeworth's "Ellen"—Mrs Hogg and wage-earning children—Children in American cotton mills—The glass bottle works—Effects of juvenile work on health—On education—On morals—On industrial efficiency.

THE very worst feature of underpaid labour is that it tends to make wage earners of children and, in so doing, deteriorates the coming generation of adult wage earners. Where work is carried on in the home, the temptation to press children into the service is very great. The tedious process of fetching and carrying work from and to the factory or workshop generally falls to their lot; indeed, workers who have no children of their own not infrequently hire a child, for a few pence, to perform that duty. The time of a child is considered to be of little value—of less value

than the three halfpence or twopence earned by the homeworker in the hour or more that is often spent in waiting. Not a few children are habitually late for school, in consequence of being thus employed. Here is an instance.

"Jane B. Standard 6. Age 13. Father a potman at 25s. a week. Mother machines uppers of boots; common goods, 10d. a dozen; better, 1s. 3d. a dozen. Jane sews on buttons, cuts apart work, inks round button holes. A little brother, aged nine, does buttons" (*i.e.*, I suppose, sews them on). "Mother, who does sometimes three dozen in a day, sometimes only three pairs, begins work at 7 A.M. Jane begins at 7.45. She goes to the shop for work, in the morning, and carries it in—a heavy load of three dozen pairs sometimes—when she comes home from school. She gets late for school, and is only in time in the afternoons."

At the same school, a girl of eleven, Alice J., pastes in the soles of babies' shoes and sews together the pairs. A sister "sews and beats." These are white buck shoes, and are paid at the rate of 1s. 1d. to 1s. 3d. a dozen. Two dozen can be done in a day. The father is a cabinet maker in regular work; the mother a cleaner (apparently at an office or warehouse).

The sister, of 18 or 19, makes 10s. a week. The little Alice works from 12 to 1, and again from 5.30 to 6.30, doing in that time a dozen or fifteen pairs; she reckons that it takes her five minutes to finish a pair, or perhaps twenty minutes for six pairs.

Esther S., aged ten, and a sister aged six, help their mother at the midday break, and also in the evening, in lining and covering boxes. 5d. a gross is paid for the smaller sort; 1s. 9d. for the larger sort. The work of the children is said to be absolutely necessary. "Dreadful home; nice woman," is the observation of the visitor whose notes I have been permitted to use.

A schoolfellow of Esther's, Sarah W., is thirteen years old and in Standard 4. Her father was in prison. Her mother drinks. These parents hid their children for eight months, and the educational authorities had great difficulty in finding them. This child, "a very bright girl," used to stay up all night making match boxes, so as to get them taken in by 11 the next morning. She now works, between school times, at capping sticks.

Another little girl sews and opens Japanese fish and poultry baskets, and sews the handles

upon string bags; she also sometimes makes the bags. She does not like the work, because it makes her hands sore and is hard work. "I can do nearly everything," this person of thirteen is reported as saying.

Employment out of school hours is not of course confined to girls. Stanley G., aged eleven, works from 5 to 7, wiring tooth brushes, and can do seven in an hour; 3½d. a dozen is paid for them. The visitor notes that he had a sore face.

Alfred D., age 13, Standard 7, helps in making white kid belts, receives 1d. in the dozen, and can do fifteen or sixteen dozen in the week.

George W., who is thirteen years old, and only in Standard 3, does wood chopping and dislikes it, because it hurts his hands. His mother "does frame work," and his father, looking glasses.

Thomas P., who is thirteen, and in Standard 5, polishes spindle legs for a cabinet maker, from 5 to 8 every evening, and from 9 to 2 on Saturdays. He receives 2s. 6d. a week; and announces that he is going to be a tobacconist—a calling for which the polishing of furniture legs hardly seems a valuable preparation.

Cases like these might be multiplied almost indefinitely.

"At a recent enquiry during the spring of this year, it was found that in a Hackney school one-fourth of the girls were engaged in match box making, steel covering, baby shoe making and fish basket sewing. This latter work is of a specially disagreeable character, and little girls often complain that the manipulation of the reeds is a most painful process. Children working with their parents at home are frequently kept at their sewing or pasting until ten or eleven o'clock at night. They are sent to "shop" before coming to school in the morning, and many of them are never marked for regular attendance. Particularly severe is the lot of the children of small laundresses, who are often employed, both in housework and in ironing in a steam laden atmosphere, two or three nights weekly till ten o'clock, and all day Saturday.[1]

Other children are employed by shopkeepers; milk and newspapers are delivered before and after school, boys are employed by grocers, greengrocers, &c., to carry out goods, and—sometimes for incredibly long hours—by barbers.

[1] Juvenile wage earners and their work. By Nettie Adler, hon. Sec. Committee on Wage-Earning children. Progress, July 1906.

Girls run errands and match stuffs and trimmings. In the Parliamentary Return obtained from school teachers by Sir John Gorst in 1899, out of 144,026 children, about 12% were described as engaged in street trading, exposed inevitably to every inclemency of weather and to all the hazards of promiscuous companionship, while acquiring habits that unfit them for regular work later in life. Moreover, the street seller, juvenile no less than adult, is apt to seek for customers in the public house. Very few, comparatively, of employed children are engaged in work that is likely to be of use to them industrially in their maturer life; and even of those few, some are working under bad conditions. The Factory Inspectors' Reports are seldom free from instances of the overwork of children. In last year's, for example, mention is made of boys under thirteen years of age, and even under twelve, being found, on several occasions, at work in bakehouses. One boy of twelve, who was found by the inspector clearing ashes from the oven, before 6 in the morning, had for two or three years been employed, before school, in delivering rolls, and at the midday break, as well as after school, in running errands.[1]

[1] Report for 1905, p. 52.

Several children under 13 years of age were found working full time in brick fields.[1]

A bad case is noted on p. 99: "A lad of 15, employed in a large tin works in West Wales, had started work at 6.30 A.M. on a certain Monday morning and continued working till 6 A.M. on the following Tuesday. During this period he only left the works for one hour, viz., 5 till 6 P.M. on Monday, when he went home and took a short rest. He had therefore worked during the whole twenty-four hours with only about one hour's rest."

The chief lady Inspector says, on pp. 302-3, "Carrying of jam and of jam-pots, empty or full, is still done largely by women and girls, and I have cautioned several occupiers about the weights I have found little girls lifting. A 40-pound tray is a heavy load for a girl of fourteen, and the repeated carrying of such trays all day long must have a bad effect."

Nor are jam makers the only employers who offend in this way. Cases have occurred in "textile factories, the places where one most expects to find labour-saving methods, but undoubtedly whenever there is a fairly abundant supply of young, cheap labour, there is

[1] Report for 1905, p. 52.

less anxiety to introduce these, and carrying, pushing or pulling heavy weights is one of the duties of the apprentice in almost every trade. In a cotton weaving factory in Lancashire I found children and young persons[1] carrying cloth from the shed to the warehouse in an upper floor. One bundle was proved to weigh 44 lbs. and another 40 lbs. In a similar factory, also in Lancashire, I was not able to have weighed any of the tins of weft which children were found carrying to the looms, but from the evident effort it was to raise the tin to the shoulder, it was clear that the weight was too great. In both cases the entire weight was on one shoulder, and it was pitiful to see the twisted little figures of the children doing their best to accomplish more than they were physically fit for."[2]

On the same page Miss Martindale speaks of a boy whom she saw in 1903 carrying a piece of clay "weighing 69 lbs., his own weight being 77 lbs. During the two years which has elapsed he has hardly grown, and he informed me that he weighs at the present time 81 lbs., showing an increase of only four lbs."

[1] A "young person" means, according to the Factory Acts, one under 18.

[2] Report for 1905, p. 296.

While it is reported that in Scotland "the half time system has almost ceased to exist," there has recently been in some districts of England, a marked increase in the number of half timers, owing to the unexampled prosperity of the cotton trade, and the difficulty of satisfying the demand for labour in that industry. In a good many districts, a half-timer may be as young as twelve years old.

What the conditions of children's employment would be, if there were no Factory Acts, may be guessed by the nature of the first Act of Parliament passed in their interests. In 1784 certain Manchester physicians investigated an outbreak of fever. They failed to discover its primary cause, but reported that "we are decided in our opinion that the disorder has been supported, diffused and aggravated by the ready communication of contagion . . . and by the injury done to young persons through confinement and too long continued labour, to which several evils the cotton mills have given occasion." They went on to say that they regarded a longer recess at noon and a shorter working day as "essential to the present health and future capacity for labour of those who are under the age of fourteen; for the active recreations of

childhood and youth are necessary to the right growth and conformation of the human body." The Manchester magistrates, who had asked for this report, resolved not to allow in future "indentures of Parish Apprentices whereby they shall be bound to owners of cotton mills and other works in which children are obliged to work in the night or more than ten hours in the day."

The condition of these unfortunate pauper children was wretched in the extreme. They were "sent down from the workhouses of London and other great towns to any manufacturer who would take them, a small premium being usually paid as an inducement. There was no system of control or inspection from outside; the factories were frequently set up in some remote glen or lonely valley where a waterfall or stream provided cheap power for the machinery and where the restraint of public opinion and observation was almost entirely absent. There can be no reasonable doubt that these unhappy children were often worked almost or entirely to death by their masters or by their overseers whose interest it was to work the apprentices to the utmost, their pay being in proportion to the labour they could extract. Sir Samuel Romilly says

in his diary that he had known cases where the apprentices had been actually murdered by their masters in order to get fresh premiums with new apprentices." [1]

The Act of 1802, the first on this subject, dealt only with apprentices and only with the textile trades. It limited the hours of work to twelve a day, forbade night work, and required a modicum of elementary instruction; moreover it provided for inspection.

By and by, it became apparent that the evils at which this measure had been aimed were not confined to any one group of child workers. As late as 1844, Sir Robert Peel told the House of Commons that in the potteries, "children worked in a temperature of from 100 to 130, carrying pieces weighing 3 lbs, and each child carrying two pieces at a time. The calculation is that the child will carry per day some thousands of pounds weight. In manufactures other than cotton, work might sometimes be continued thirteen, fifteen, even seventeen or eighteen hours consecutively." [2]

Nor was there any limit as to the earliness

[1] The Case for the Factory Acts. Edited by Mrs Sidney Webb. Chapter II. The Historical Development of the Factory Acts. By Miss B. L. Hutchins, pp. 80-81.

[2] Case for the Factory Acts, pp. 82-3.

of the age at which a child might be set to work. About five or six seems to have been a common age for beginning. I have, myself, been acquainted with a woman of about eighty years old who told me that as a child of five, when she was too little to reach the work table and had to stand upon a stool, she was employed all day long in "running blonde net." Evidence was brought forward—exactly as similar evidence is brought forward to-day in America—to show that it was not really injurious to children of nine years old and under to be kept working for 14 or 15 hours daily; and, no doubt, there were persons not in the least inhumane who really thought so. The best of us are liable to social blindness, and able to see but a small part of contemporary evils that become plainly visible and unendurable to succeeding generations. An instance of such blindness, in the case of the disinterested and open minded Maria Edgeworth, may be found in the pages of her *Rosamond*—that delightful children's book too little known to the modern child. In reading the passage it should be remembered that the whole Edgeworth family were persons of unusual enlightenment and benevolence, and that the view presented probably typifies

the bettermost stratum of contemporary sentiment.

Rosamond, with her parents, goes to visit a cotton mill conducted by "a very sensible, humane man, who did not think only of how he could get so much work done for himself, but also how he could preserve the health of those who worked for him; and how he could make them as comfortable and happy as possible." This good employer was in all probability drawn from some member of the Strutt family. By and by, while the visitors are resting and eating "cherries, ripe cherries, strawberries and cream," provided by "this hospitable gentleman," Godfrey calls to his parents to "'look out of this window. . . All the people are going from work. Look what numbers of children are passing through this great yard!'

"The children passed close by the window at which Godfrey and Rosamond had stationed themselves. Among the little children came some tall girls and among these there was one, a girl about twelve years old, whose countenance particularly pleased them. Several of the younger ones were crowding round her.

"'Laura, Laura, look at this girl! What

a good countenance she has,' said Rosamond, 'and how fond the little children seem of her!'

"'That is Ellen. She is an excellent girl,' said the master of the manufactory, 'and those little children have good reason to be fond of her.'"

He then relates how a good clergyman, who had taught the children and won their grateful affection, had been appointed to a post elsewhere.

"'All the children in the manufactory were sorry that he was going away, and they wished to do something that should prove to him their respect and gratitude.

"'They considered and consulted among themselves. They had no money, nothing of their own to give, but their labour; and they agreed that they would work a certain number of hours beyond their usual time, to earn money to buy a silver cup, which they might present to him the day before that appointed for his departure. They were obliged to sit up a great part of the night to work to earn their shares. Several of the little children were not able to bear the fatigue and the want of sleep. For this they were very sorry, and when Ellen saw how

sorry they were, she pitied them, and she did more than pity them. After she had earned her own share of the money to be subscribed for buying the silver cup, she sat up every night a certain time to work, to earn the shares of all these little children.

"'Ellen never said anything of her intentions, but went on working steadily, till she had accomplished her purpose. I used to see her night after night, and used to fear she would hurt her health, and often begged her not to labour so hard, but she said, "It does me good, sir."'"

The modern reader will sigh to think of what the admirable Ellen's health and strength would probably be at thirty, and will find it difficult to forgive the complacency of the employer in whose mill she was permitted so to squander her physical resources.

In our own country the general development of factory legislation has gone far towards stopping the overwork of children in mills and factories; though it is only of late years, and thanks to the exertions of Mrs Hogg, that the law has begun to attempt the regulation of children's labour out of school

hours either in their own homes or for outside employers.[1]

In the United States, however, where each State is free to make its own regulations, there is, at this present day, one State (Georgia) in which the work of children is absolutely unrestricted, and several in which the practical limitation is extremely small. Children of any age may be, and actually are, kept at work in the cotton mills of the Southern States, precisely as they used to be in the mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire. "Only last year, in North Carolina, the testimony of two doctors was introduced to show that there was no need from a hygienic point of view, for a law forbidding girls under fourteen to stand at their work for twelve hours a day, or for boys or girls under fourteen to work a twelve-hour night."[2]

Boys of twelve may still legally work in

[1] Bye-laws under the Employment of Children Act have now been passed in many towns, and the London County Council has at last been permitted by the Home Office to establish a fairly satisfactory code. Really satisfactory no code can be which sanctions any employment of children during school years, but in this department, as in others, the interposition of the law has done something to check glaring industrial evils.

[2] *Child Labor.* A menace to industry, education and good citizenship (No. 93 of the Annals of the American Academy of political and social science. March 1906.) p. 318.

the coal mines of Kansas and in all mines in Iowa, Missouri and North Carolina; and do so work. "No colliery has been visited in which children have not been found employed at ages prohibited by the law of the State."[1]

In some American glass bottle works, quite small boys are kept running to and fro with loads of hot glass all through the day or the night as the case may be. Mrs Kelley, reporting personal visits of inspection, says that she found it impossible to get from any boy "a consecutive statement as to his name, address or parentage. A boy would say, 'My name is Jimmie'; and then trot to the cooling oven with his load of bottles; and returning would say, in answer to a fresh question, 'I live in a shanty boat,' then trot to the moulder for another load of bottles; and returning say, 'I'm going to be eight next summer,' and so on. Among twenty-four lads questioned during one night inspection, not one ventured to pause long enough to put together two of the foregoing statements."[2]

"There was no restriction upon night work

[1] *Child Labor*, p. 293.

[2] Some ethical gains through legislation. By Florence Kelley, p. 44.

and pitifully little children were found at work at two o'clock in the morning."[1]

Some of these children are directly imported —as the little serfs in English cotton mills often were—from other districts; and in these States of America, as in England once, not only ruthless employers but worthless adults of their own class, parents and others, make profits out of the toil of half grown children.

"A worn out and dissolute glass blower, who had a pension of $8 a month and five children under the age of fourteen years had recently married a widow with six children under fifteen years. Father, mother and the eleven children were living in a tent between the river and the works where several of the children were employed, some by night and some by day, so that the beds in the tent were used by different children, one set rising to go to work when the others returned to sleep."[2]

Upon the future of these poor children the effect of this early toil is most injurious. Physically, mentally and morally, the children —the citizens of the next generation—are damaged.

Significant is the remark of a mother quoted

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 45. [2] *Ibid.*, p 49.

in one of the articles in *Child Labor:* "'When Charley works on the night shift, he hasn't any appetite.'" (p. 303.)

Doubtless the half timers in a good English mill are examples of children working under the best of existing conditions; and manufacturers are fond of assuring us how good these conditions are. Yet I shall never forget the painful impression made upon myself by the peculiar mixture of pallor and eagerness on the faces of the little half timers, the first time that I went over a weaving mill. The working place was light and airy, and the situation, just outside a healthy Northern town, was admirable; the work was not physically hard, and the management, as I was assured by a trustworthy witness, who was himself at work there, considerate. He, for his part, seemed unaware that the children looked ill. Incidentally, however, he mentioned that a large proportion of his fellow workers drank; and I felt that it would be interesting to know how many of them had been half timers, and whether early exhaustion might not lie at the root of their intemperance. As to the children, I am quite sure that any London doctor, or any woman accustomed to the care of children, would have thought

their appearance unhealthy and their expression of face abnormal.

Evidence more valuable than any untrained observer's impression is on record in regard to London school children. Dr Thomas, assistant Medical Officer of Health to the London County Council, in investigating the physical condition of 2000 school children, in 14 different schools, gave special attention to 384 wage earners among the boys. "Of this number 233 showed signs of fatigue, 140 were proved to be anæmic, 131 had severe nerve signs, 64 were suffering from deformities resulting from the carrying of heavy weights, and 51 had severe heart signs. Barbers' boys were found to suffer most in physique, 72 per cent being anæmic, 63 per cent showing severe nerve strain, and 27 per cent severe heart affection."[1]

Before the Inter-Departmental Committee on the employment of school children, appointed in 1901, evidence was given by Alderman Watts, of Manchester, of the abnormal death-rate among children in industrial schools, many of whom had drifted thither from the streets; and in 1904 Sir

[1] Juvenile wage earners. By Nettie Adler, Hon. Sec. Committee on Wage earning children. *Progress.* July 1906

Lambert Ormsby, President of the Royal College of Surgeons, of Dublin, gave to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, particulars of the miserable physique of the little street sellers and of the many cases of pneumonia among them which had been brought to his notice in the children's hospitals.[1]

In July 1905, when an inquiry was held by the Home Office into the Bye-laws for the Employment of Children proposed by the London County Council, Mr Marshall Jackman, of the Michael Faraday School, Walworth, gave evidence that, out of 227 boys in that school, 27 were at work of whom 13 were employed more than eight hours a day, and 13 after nine o'clock at night. All except six were in poor health. One had broken down altogether; one had a weak circulation; one had fainted in school during the previous week; yet another had a defective circulation. In one single week, nine boys who worked out of school hours were taken ill in school, were obliged to leave the class and suspend lessons for the rest of the afternoon.[2]

[1] Minutes of Evidence. Questions 12644, 12758.

[2] These facts and more to the same purpose may be found in an article by Miss Adler in the *Guardian* of May 9, 1906.

Very similar evidence may be found in the pages of Mrs Kelley's volume, in those of *Child Labor*, and in the Report of the American Consumers' League. On p. 297 of *Child Labor* appears the following paragraph which should make every British reader thankful for the comparative stringency of our own Factory Acts: "A recent study of the reports of factory inspectors in several of our industrial States shows a remarkable uniformity in the percentage of accidents. We find in the textile mills, foundries and iron mills, glass houses and machine shops employing children that, in proportion to the number of children employed, accidents to children under sixteen years of age are from 250 to 300% more frequent than to adults."

Educationally, the results of early industrial labour are naturally disastrous. "In none of the great Southern States," writes Mrs Kelley, "in which young children are employed in manufacture are 80% of the children between 10 and 14 years of age able to read and write."[1]

At the Home Office enquiry, Mr Marshall Jackman stated that although the boys who worked out of school hours were of more than average mental capacity, they were more than

[1] Some ethical gains through legislation, p. 86.

twelve months behind the average of the whole school in educational standing, and moreover were low down even in their lower classes. Of the 27 boys in his school who were employed, eleven were one standard below the average, two, two standards below; four, three standards below; and one, four standards below the general average.

A report prepared in 1901 for the Scottish Council for Women's Trades gives the opinions of 14 head masters, who are practically unanimous as to the detrimental effect upon the children's progress of long hours of work out of school. No. 3 says: "I consider this exploiting of children is one of the greatest crimes against the children themselves, and the greatest possible hindrance to their education." No. 6 thinks "there can be no doubt that children who have such long spells of employment are heavily handicapped"; and No. 7 says: "There is no doubt whatever that these long hours stand very much in the way of educational progress." "Message running," says No. 14, "certainly tends to sharpen intelligence of a superficial kind but weakens the power of sustained attention and vigorous mental work in school."[1]

[1] Pp. 12, 13, 14.

When we remember that the Inter-Departmental Committee on the employment of school children—a cautious official body—estimated the *minimum* number of school children employed in the United Kingdom at 200,000, and that there is no reason to suppose that number materially lessened, we perceive that the deterioration of national education from this cause alone must be by no means trifling.

Of moral injury, especially from street selling, there is abundant evidence, both in our own country and in the United States. The committee of 1901 received a statement from the Town Clerk of Newcastle on Tyne that children had been found in the streets afraid to go home, lest they should be punished for not bringing in enough money. The children often, in consequence, slept out, gambled or stole, the girls sinking lower yet in order to procure sufficient money to take home. The number of such children he reported to have increased greatly of late years, and many of them were, he feared, on the threshold of a life of vice and crime. The Chief Constable of Manchester presented a list of 16 women known as degraded characters, who had formerly been street sellers. The Chief

Constable of Birmingham produced tables showing that of 713 children engaged in street trading during July 1901, 458 had been prosecuted for various offences during the previous six months. 163 of the number were girls.[1]

Boys in American glass works are almost proverbially ill conducted. One manufacturer, in Ohio, said, in answer to an appeal for the education of the boys: "You can't do anything for them. The little devils are vicious from their birth." Statements of the same kind used to be made about the poor little victims in the English mills but it is not observed that the modern half timer, whose hours and health are protected by law, is any more vicious than other children. The principal of a Pennsylvanian school sets the corruption of the boys at a much later date than infancy. He says: "'My observation is that when a boy leaves school and goes into the factory at twelve or thirteen, by the time he is fifteen or sixteen he is too foul-mouthed to associate with decent people.'"[2]

Street occupations on the farther as on the

[1] Inter-Departmental Committee on the employment of school children. Minutes of Evidence, pp. 275, 455, 471.

[2] Child Labor, p. 302.

hither side of the Atlantic are shown to form an easy avenue to worse things. "Although the street trades in Washington engage only one-fourth of the total number of children engaged in all occupations, yet of the number of children under 15 who have gone to the reform school, or who have been turned over by the courts to the care of the probation officers, over two-thirds have come from the ranks of the children engaged in the street trades."[1]

"A judge told the writer that one-third of all the delinquent boys brought before him had at one time or another served the public as messenger boys."[2]

Nor are those children of school age who go to work often found to be acquiring any sort of technical training or industrial skill. On the contrary, indeed; their employment is almost always of a kind that rather unfits them than prepares them to become industrially efficient. Sadly true are the words written by Mrs Kelley out of prolonged and wide experience. "The State which accepts the plea of poverty and permits the children of the poorest citizens to labour prematurely, accepts the heritage of new poverty flowing

[1] Child Labor, p. 275.

[2] Some ethical gains through legislation, p. 17.

from two sources; namely, on the one hand, the relaxed efforts of fathers of families to provide for them, and on the other hand the corruption of weak children by inappropriate occupations which involve temptations beyond the child's power of resistance and the exhaustion of strong children by overwork. It is exactly the most conscientious and promising children who are worked into the grave or into nervous prostration, or into that saddest state of all, the moral fatigue which enables a man to sit idly about for years while his wife or mistress or his children support him."[1]

Thus the employment of the young which is generally regarded as a result of poverty is really one of the causes of poverty, and that for several reasons. It tends to lower the wages of the adult worker and tends to make the family, instead of the father, the industrial unit; it diminishes the adult working power of the child itself,[2] and it also retards the progress of every trade in which it occurs, for

[1] Some ethical gains through legislation, p. 42.

[2] Mr S. W. Woodward, of the firm of Woodward and Lathrop, Washington, in a short paper called: "A Business-Man's View of Child Labour," writes: "It may be stated as a safe proposition that for every dollar earned by a child under 14 years of age tenfold will be taken from their earning capacity in later life." Child Labor, p. 362.

as Mr Schoenhof says: "The cheapness of human labour where it prevails is the greatest incentive for the perpetuation of obsolete methods." [1]

Thus, in every respect, the industrial employment of children is an injury to the community; and it is more than possible (I am not recommending the course as a practicable one) that, in the long run, the nation would save money by undertaking the whole support and education up to the age of sixteen of every child who now works for wages. Short of this extreme measure, however, there is little doubt that, except for the fear lest hardships might be intensified, public opinion is ready for far more stringent limitation of child labour. If it were known that the wages of parents were, even approximately, adequate (as they would be under a Minimum Wage Law) most of the objections now made to the restriction of child labour would die away. That fact alone is no inconsiderable argument in favour of a Minimum Wage Law.

[1] J. Schoenhof. Economy of High Wages, p. 38.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

Home work—Factory work—The working girl—Her manners, virtues and code of honour—The woman into whom she developes—Shop assistants—Traffic workers—Children—"Sweated" workers often producing high priced goods—Not drunken—Not idle—Not unskilful—Men as helpless, economically, as women—Sweating an invariable accompaniment of unregulated labour.

THE preceding chapters do not profess to give anything like a general survey of the whole field of British labour. It has seemed wise for many reasons to confine myself to aspects with which I am, in a greater or less degree, personally familiar; and therefore the work of women, and of London women especially, looms rather large. But I hope that I have shown, by a sufficient range of instances, certain general truths. In trade after trade, men, women and children are exhibited working in the conditions which are indicated, comprehensively but vaguely, by the term "sweating." We have seen the dwelling of the homeworker robbed of every feature that

makes a home, its narrow space littered with match boxes, or with shirts or trousers or paper bags—in any case transformed into one of the most comfortless of workshops. In some homes the rattle of the sewing machine forms a ceaseless accompaniment to the whole course of family life; in others, meals, such as they are, are eaten in the immediate neighbourhood of the glue pot or the paste pot; the smell of new cloth, the dust and fluff of flannelette pervade the room of the "finisher"; damp paper bags or damp cardboard boxes lie piled on beds; home, parents and children are all subservient to unintermittent and most unremunerative labour.

One step, but only one step, higher comes the factory "hand." We have seen girls filling pots with boiling jam, carrying to and fro heavy trays and stacking these trays in piles, two together raising, sometimes to above the height of their own heads, trays some of which weigh well over half a hundredweight. We have seen them, even when their work was not in itself heavy, worn out by the rapidity with which they repeat endlessly, day after day, and week after week, operations of mechanical monotony. Some glimpse has been given of those horrible intervals in which the semi-

starvation of "full work" gives place to the acute privation of "slack time." The dangers, discomforts, hardships and exactions that must be borne if an employer chooses to inflict them, have been indicated, though but very inadequately; and the example of laundries and jam factories has served to suggest how far worse yet would be the conditions of factory operatives if the law did not intervene for their protection.

One thing I have not succeeded in picturing —and it is the thing which seems to me perhaps the most terrible of all: the change of the working girl into the working woman. I have not drawn the factory girl as I have known her and delighted in her, gay to "cheekiness," staunchly loyal, wonderfully uncomplaining, wonderfully ready to make allowances for "the governor" as long as he speaks her fair and shows consideration in trifles, but equally resolute to "pay him out," when once she is convinced of his meanness or spitefulness. Her language is devoid, to a degree remarkable even in our undemonstrative race, of any tenderness or emotion. She accepts an invitation with the ungracious formula: "I don't mind if I do." Upon the "mate" of her own sex, to whom she is so much more warmly

devoted than to her "chap," she never bestows a word of endearment. "Hi, 'Liza, d'y' think I'm going to wait all night for you?" is the tone of her address to the friend with whom she will share her last penny or for whom she will pawn her last item of pawnable property. She speaks roughly to her relatives and aggressively to the world at large; she is no respecter of persons, and her eye for affectation or insincerity is unerring. Condescend to her and she will "chaff" you off the field. But meet her on equal terms, help her without attempting to "boss" her, and within a month or two you will have won her unalterable allegiance; her face will light up at your coming; she will bear the plainest speech from you, and on occasion of emergency will obey implicitly your every command. Nor is she lacking in the fundamental parts of politeness. Here is an instance. Years ago, in the days when some of us still believed in the possibility of organising unskilled women, a member of the Dockers' Union sent me word that I should find it possible to walk at dinner time straight into the dining room of a certain factory and talk to the workers undisturbed, since at that hour both the foreman and the porter went home to their own meals. I went,

accordingly, though I confess that I felt myself very much of a trespasser. As I mounted the extremely grimy stair to the dining room, I heard the loud voices of the girls. Their language was singularly vile. It did not, no doubt, mean very much to them; they used horrible words as the young of another class use slang. I went in and said my little say. After the first few words, most of them listened; several asked questions; a certain amount of conversation continued to go on. But while I was in the room—and, remember, I was a complete stranger to all of them—not one word was spoken which I could justly have felt to be offensive. I distributed my handbills, told them I hoped they would come to the meeting, and departed. As I went downstairs, I heard them relapsing into their hideous vernacular. But I could not help reflecting that they had shown the essence of good manners; and also that, if the literature of the eighteenth century is to be trusted, the same form of good manners was far from being universal among those swearing country gentlemen who were the great grandfathers of our smooth spoken generation.[1]

[1] It must not be assumed from the above anecdote that all factory girls are foul-mouthed. This was by no means true

The factory girl's code of honour is curiously like that of the school boy. In no circumstances will she denounce a companion. To the governor or to the forewoman she will lie freely if occasion demands. To those whom she recognises as allies, she is truth itself. I do not recall one single instance, in disputes between workers and employers, in which the tale told by working girls has not been proved true in every detail. With employers, I am sorry to say, this has often been by no means the case. Two qualities, in particular, mark the factory girl of from sixteen to twenty: her exuberant spirits and energy, and the invariable improvement in manner and language that follows upon any sort of amelioration in her position. To watch the rapid development of refinement and gentleness consequent upon joining a good club is to feel how sound is the national character and how lamentable the yearly waste of admirable human material.

A few years pass, a very few, and these bright girls become apathetic, listless women of whom at 35 it is impossible to guess whether their age is 40 or 50. They are tired out;

even in the year after the Dock strike, and is much less true now. But I have no doubt there are still factories in which the habit of foul speech is a sort of fashion.

they toil on, but they have ceased to look forward or to entertain any hopes. The contrast between the factory girl and her mother is perhaps the very saddest spectacle that the labour world presents. To be the wife of a casual labourer, the mother of many children, living always in too small a space and always in a noise, is an existence that makes of too many women, in what ought to be the prime of their lives, mere machines of toil, going on from day to day, with as little hope and as little happiness as the sewing machine that furnishes one item in their permanent weariness.

We ascend another step and come to the shop assistants, the clerks and the waitresses in restaurants. We find that these dapper young men and trim young women whose hands and faces are so much cleaner and whose speech and manners are so much smoother than those of the factory worker, are scarcely better off in the matter of pay, and often absolutely worse off in the matter of working conditions. The factory worker is at least free after the factory closes, and, except in laundries, the law generally succeeds in bringing down the hours of work to something near a reasonable limit.

But the shop assistant is subject to rule during practically the whole of his or her working life; food, companions, dress, sleeping arrangements, hours of going to bed and of getting up, nay, the very medical man to be consulted in case of illness are thrust upon him without any choice of his own. The privilege, so dear to the natural man, of wearing an old coat and old slippers in the hours of relaxation, is not for the shop assistant; nor the modern diversion of experimenting with new and strange foods, nor the right of voting at elections, either municipal or parliamentary. The position combines, in short, the disagreeables of boarding school with those of domestic service, while failing to offer the pleasant features of either. It is indeed a moot point in my own mind whether it is not worse to be a shop assistant than a home-worker, supposing the home-worker to be a single woman. Personally, I would rather make cardboard boxes in silence and solitude, and buy for myself my own inferior bread and cheap tea.

Chapter IV. brings us to the case of workers who are all men, who are engaged in a most necessary public service and employed for the most part by rich companies paying high

dividends. Here the inexperienced would expect to find high wages and good conditions prevailing. In fact, however, we find, in the case of railway servants, that the hours of work imposed were so excessive as to constitute a public danger and to demand the intervention of the law. The drivers and conductors of trams and omnibuses have been shown to be in a large measure enslaved by the companies for which they work, their hours often cruelly long, their pay often reduced from a decent nominal to a quite inadequate actual wage, their conditions of work, in many cases, singularly oppressive and their liberty of passing into fresh employment, although not so completely barred as the railway servant's, yet very seriously hampered and restricted. In short we behold a body of grown men, skilled and of good character, almost as unable as the isolated home-worker to defend themselves against a strong and tyrannical employer.

Last of all, we come to the children. In these days we are continually talking in tones of alarm about a declining birth rate and are at last seriously considering how to check the appalling infant mortality that makes an annual massacre of the innocents; but most

of us are still very little awake to the sacrifice of childhood that is daily being made in our midst. We pass a pale child in the street, carrying a long bundle in a black wrapper, and the sight makes no impression. But, to those of us who have seen the under side of London, that little figure is a type of unremunerative toil, of stunted growth, of weakened vitality and of wasted school teaching: an example of that most cruel form of improvidence described by the French proverb as "eating our wheat as grass." Labour in childhood inevitably means, in nine cases out of ten, decadence in early manhood or womanhood; and the prevalence of it among ourselves is perhaps the most serious of national dangers. There is probably no branch of home work in which child labour is not involved, and but very few branches of retail trade. Our milk, our newspapers, our greengrocery are brought to us by small boys; young boys are out at all hours and in all weathers with parcel-delivering vans; and many and many a perambulator is pushed by a small girl whose chin is on a level with the handle. If, in 1901, there were, as the Interdepartmental Committee declared, *at least* 200,000 school children working for wages,

and if, as seems practically certain, the number is larger now, can we wonder that so many grown up workers have remained inefficient, incompetent and listless? We cannot have grain, if we choose to eat the wheat in the blade.

We see, then, that large bodies of British workpeople are, in these early years of the twentieth century, extremely overworked and underpaid. These evils are not, as is so often declared, a result of cheap selling. One of the worst examples of underpayment in the Sweated Industries Exhibition was a lady's combination garment, of nainsook, the selling price of which was 22s.; and much of the work produced by the underpaid is sold at a good price to the well-to-do. On the other hand, under a well organised factory system, goods that are sold at a very low price are sometimes produced by workers receiving comparatively high wages. Nor is it true that any large proportion of these ill paid workers are either drunken or idle, or yet incompetent. Incompetent, indeed, they eventually become, if they are starved, physically and mentally, for a long enough period; but many of them remain competent for a surprising number of years. Very many of them are pathetically

industrious, and by no means all are unskilled. Neither my reader nor I, for instance, could cover a racquet ball so that it would pass muster when inspected by the paymaster; it is improbable that either of us could cover an umbrella, and pretty certain that neither could make a passable artificial rose of even the poorest description. The driver of a motor omnibus is—in theory at least, and often in practice—a highly skilled mechanic; but his skill does not enable him (his trade union being still comparatively young and weak) to retain his freedom of action nor to resist the most exhausting and harassing conditions of labour.

The evil is thus not confined to women, nor to home workers, nor to any class or trade. Nor is it confined to any one country. Nearly every instance quoted could be matched from Germany and from America. "Sweating," in short, invariably tends to appear wherever and whenever industry is not either highly organised or else stringently regulated by law.

CHAPTER VII

HOW UNDERPAYMENT COMES

A shirtmaker's story—The "higgling of the market" as seen at the factory gate—Mr Booth's percentage of poverty—Mr Rowntree's—The living wage in America—How wages are determined—By relative needs — Not by efficiency — Mr Bosanquet's fundamental fallacy—Ambiguity of word "earn" —Effect upon the poor of the pressure of the poorer—Efficiency only of pecuniary value while rare—Not inefficiency but poverty the real disease.

MORE than seventeen years ago I sat in the neat but poverty stricken room of a most respectable family and listened to the pathetic, uncomplaining words of an admirable woman who, together with her sister, had, for years, helped to support an early widowed sister-in-law and her three children. All three women worked at home at shirt-making, and this one of the aunts had certainly gone short of food. It was not she who told me of her good deeds. She was showing me, at my request, the shirts that they were at that time making for a payment of 1s. 2d. a dozen. I continue in the words of my own report, written immediately afterwards.

"These shirts are of fair average quality and are striped in gay colours. They have to be fetched ready cut out but not folded; all the sewing has to be done to them, including a square of lining at the back of the neck but not the button holes . . . 'Has the price gone down much?' I asked. 'Oh, yes' said Miss Y.; 'my sister and I used to get sixpence apiece. But that was for rather better shirts than these. We worked for B.'s then. One day my sister was there, waiting for the work, and a gentleman came in and said to Mr B., "I'll take the whole lot at 4s. 6d. a dozen"; and Mr B. said to my sister: "Miss Y., will you take the work at that, or must I give it all to this gentleman?" And my sister thought, if we stood out for the price, they would come round to us, and she said, "No," she would not take it, and so he gave it to the gentleman and we were thrown out; and instead of coming round to sixpence again, that work has gone down to 2s. 6d. a dozen, and even lower than that. I know of people who do the very cheapest cotton shirts at 9d. or even 7d. a dozen.'"

Miss Y.'s little story is the story of work in hundreds — nay in thousands — of work-places. Sometimes it is at the factory gate

that the cheapening process goes on. Towards the end of those bitter weeks, "the slack time," there will be scores of factory girls, pale and pinched under their shabby feathered hats, going from firm to firm and asking whether hands are wanted. At last word will go round that X.'s are "taking on" on Monday morning. Before the opening hour on Monday morning, the entrance to Mr X.'s factory will look like the pit door of a popular theatre. Often have I heard girls describe the dialogue that follows.

"The foreman says to a young girl in front of me: 'What wages do you want?' And she says: 'Eight shillings.' And he told her: 'No, she could go.' So when he come to me, I knew it was no good to say, 'Eight'; so I said: 'Seven and six.'"

At seven and sixpence, perhaps, she gets taken on; and when, presently, the slack time comes again, the girls weeded out, to be first discharged, are those who have been receiving eight shillings weekly ever since their engagement in the previous season. Seven shillings and sixpence a week (translated or not, according to the custom of the factory, into terms of piece work) now becomes the usual wage; and next season

this descends by another sixpence or another shilling.

Below six shillings or five shillings, an employer or foreman seldom tries to drive the time wage, even of girls, unless, indeed, he can salve his conscience by regarding them as learners. Yet I have known a wealthy employer admit without any signs of compunction, both that certain girls in his employ were paid four shillings a week, and that they could not live on that sum.

The home worker, when he thus suffers diminution of an already insufficient wage, tries to increase output by setting his children to work.

"The same pressure that leads to the employment of the children presently leads, in a slack time, to the acceptance of yet lower pay for the sake of securing work. The poorer the worker the less possible is any resistance to any reduction in pay. Thus, by and by, mother and children, working together, come to receive no more than did the mother working alone. The employer—and eventually in all probability the public—has in fact obtained the labour of the children without extra payment. To such an extent has this process been carried that in the worst

paid branches of home work, subsistence becomes almost impossible unless the work of children is called in."[1]

It is thus true that, economically, a man's enemies are those of his own household; and that, wherever workers are not protected by organisation or by special laws, the wage, first of the individual and then of the family, tends to be brought down to the lowest possible level of subsistence, and even, possibly if a poor-law subsidy can be obtained, below it. It is not by chance, nor because their work is of little value, nor because they are contented to take little pay, that all these many households of workers are living lives so cruelly straitened by poverty. Nor is it a mere effect of chance that in other countries as well as in our own, national wealth is beheld increasing side by side with extreme poverty on the part of those citizens who toil most incessantly.

In our own country, the investigations of Mr Charles Booth and of Mr Seebohm Rowntree, carried out independently and on slightly differing methods, the one in London, the other in York, have resulted in figures strikingly similar. Mr Booth puts

[1] Handbook to Sweated Industries Exhibition, p. 23.

the proportion living in poverty, of the whole population of London, at 30·7%; Mr Rowntree, that of the whole population of York, at 27·84%.[1]

In America the same problem has received the attention of various careful enquirers, the most recent of whom, perhaps, is Father Ryan, Professor of ethics and economics in the St Paul Seminary, Minnesota.[2]

In this volume may be found a careful estimate of the figure that may be taken as affording a "living wage" in different parts of the United States. Professor Albion Small, head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, is quoted as having said "a few years ago" that "No man can live, bring up a family, and enjoy the ordinary human happiness on a wage of less than one thousand dollars a year" (£200).[3]

Mr John Mitchell, President of the United Mine Workers, says, in a passage quoted by Professor Ryan: "In cities of from five

[1] Poverty. By J. Seebohm Rowntree, p. 229.

[2] A Living Wage: Its ethical and economic aspect. Macmillans. New York, April 1906.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 136. I must not be understood as committing myself to these figures, which apply to America. They are employed here to show that a large proportion of American wage earners do not receive the sum considered by experts as affording a "Living Wage."

thousand to one hundred thousand inhabitants, the American standard of living should mean, to the ordinary unskilled workman with an average family, a comfortable house of at least six rooms. It should mean a bath-room, good sanitary plumbing, a parlour, dining room, kitchen and sufficient sleeping room that decency may be preserved and a reasonable degree of comfort maintained. The American standard of living should mean, to the unskilled workman, carpets, pictures, books and furniture with which to make his home bright, comfortable and attractive for himself and his family, an ample supply of clothing suitable for winter and summer and above all a sufficient quantity of good, wholesome, nourishing food at all times of the year. The American standard, moreover, should mean to the unskilled workman that his children should be kept at school until they have attained the age of sixteen at least, and that he is enabled to lay by sufficient to maintain himself and his family in times of illness or at the close of his industrial life, when age and weakness render further work impossible, and to make provision for his family against premature death from accident or otherwise."[1]

[1] I have not personally referred to Mr Mitchell's book, the

The minimum wage upon which a family could be supported, in towns of the size named, was estimated by Mr Mitchell in 1903 at $600 a year (£120). In larger cities the cost would, he considered, be higher. Professor Ryan is, no doubt, right in saying that "the irreducible minimum of necessaries and comforts" could not "now" (he was writing in October 1905) be obtained in any city of the United States for less than $600, and that though that sum might be "*possibly* a Living Wage in the moderately sized cities of the West, North and East . . . in some of the largest cities of the last-named regions, it is certainly *not* a Living Wage." [1]

Having established this figure for annual income Professor Ryan goes out to enquire into its actual prevalence and from various official reports and statistics draws the conclusion that, "the number of male adults receiving less than $12.50 (£2, 10s.) per week, in 34 manufacturing industries was, in 1890, 66%, and, in 1900, 64%."[2]

And it must be remembered that in America as in England there are few manufacturing

title of which is "Organised Labour." Professor Ryan gives the pages from which this extract comes: pp. 116, 117.

[1] A Living Wage, p. 150.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 164.

industries in which wage earners are in full work throughout the year.

Thus it appears that, in the two great English speaking empires, a considerable proportion, even of the upper working classes, do not receive remuneration that allows to them and to their families that minimum of space, food, clothing and recreation which at the present day are esteemed essential to civilised life.

The reason of this state of things is a fairly simple one. Wages, in a state of free competition, are determined not by the intrinsic cost of the work performed but by the relative needs of the worker to sell and of the paymaster to buy. Where there are many workers able to offer the same service and comparatively few buyers, the work will be paid for at a low rate, however excellent; where would-be buyers' workers are few and would-be buyers many, the work will be highly paid, however ill done. Among ourselves the numbers competing for manual work are very large, and the need of each particular workman for employment far greater, and more pressing than the need of any employer for any particular man. Consequently, the wages of the manual worker are low in proportion to

the cost of livelihood; and the individual worker is absolutely powerless by himself to increase them.

These facts are so familiar, and, when definitely stated, so universally admitted, that it almost seems necessary to apologise for reiterating them. Yet they are continually ignored by ordinary middle class people in conversing upon labour questions, and not infrequently even by writers of some standing. Categorically, they are not—and doubtless would not be—denied; but whole volumes are founded upon the basis of their falsity. The entire constructive argument, for instance, of Mrs Bosanquet's "The Strength of the People," a book which, having gone into a second edition, may be supposed to have influenced a good many readers, rests upon a tacit assumption that payment is determined by quality of work: an assumption masked by the ambiguous character of the word "earn," which at one moment is used in the sense of "deserve" and at another in the sense of "receive." Mrs Bosanquet—except indeed when dealing with the old Poor Law—cheerfully ignores the painful law that wages are determined by the conflict of needs, and writes, throughout, as though the manual worker who does good

work were sure of being well paid. From this assumption she goes on, very logically, to suppose that the cure for a man's poverty is to make him do good work. Many persons who are not themselves exposed to the pinch of competition may be found expressing the same view, which obtains apparent support from the fact that the very ill paid are observed not to be producing good work. For, although it is unfortunately not true that good work always "earns" good wages, it is true that bad pay, sooner or later, but quite inevitably leads to bad work. Without a certain modicum of food, comfort, good clothing, leisure and ease of mind, no human being long remains capable of producing good work. The father of a family who receives 18s. a week and pays 7s. for lodging cannot, if he also feeds his wife and children, either remain or become a very good workman. Before he can do better work he must be better paid.

Mrs Bosanquet thinks otherwise. Efficiency and consequently prosperity might, she appears to believe, be enforced upon the poor by the withdrawal of such help as is now accorded them. The prospect of that beloved refuge, the workhouse, prevents them from providing for their old age; but the prospect of literal

starvation would probably be more effective. The hunger and hardship of their daily lives do not furnish an adequate spur; but perhaps despair might do so. We seem to hear Mrs Chick exhorting the dying Mrs Dombey to "make an effort."

Again, that terrible pressure of the poorer upon the poor which Mr Booth regards as so serious an evil appears to Mrs Bosanquet an element of hope and strength. Morally, the charity of the poor to one another is undoubtedly a beautiful thing; economically, it is assuredly one of the causes that increase and aggravate poverty; and such diminution of pauperism as is produced by the maintenance out of the workhouse of an aged or sick relative may, in the long run, lead to the destitution of a whole family. The last result of such maintenance may, if wide-spread, be far more nationally expensive than if all the sick and aged were supported out of the public purse.

Let us see, in an example of the commonest kind, how this mutual help works out. Smith and Brown, manual labourers, are working side by side at a wage of £1 a week or thereabouts. Both are married men with children. Both are contributing to a provident

society which, if they survive the age of sixty, will furnish a small pittance to their declining years. Slack times come; Smith is discharged; Brown is retained. Within a fortnight, Smith, with his wife and children, begins to suffer hardship; the household property goes, piecemeal, to the pawnshop; the "club money" is no longer forthcoming, and Smith's provision for his old age lapses. Brown, whose pound a week affords, as may be supposed, no great superfluity for him and his, finds himself unable to see his "mate" and his mate's children in want of bread; Brown's club money and a good deal more which can ill be spared goes to their assistance, and Brown's provision for old age lapses.

The Smith family, it is true, has been kept from the workhouse—at the cost, not improbably, of some weakly little Smith's life—but has not this result been bought too dear? Do not justice and good sense alike suggest the unfitness of leaving the burden of maintaining the Smith family to rest upon precisely that class of the community which is least able to support it? The maintenance of those who cannot maintain themselves by those who can barely maintain themselves keeps both groups upon a dead level of destitution. If our aim

is really the strengthening of the people we must not begin by increasing the burdens of the weakest—burdens borne often at so cruel a sacrifice of health and life, and with so amazing an absence of complaint. The Smith family and the Brown family alike are suffering because their income is barely adequate to their elementary current needs; and their troubles will only be cured by the possession of a larger real income. This, indeed, Mrs Bosanquet sees plainly enough. "How can we bring it about," she asks, "that they" (*i.e.* "those whom we may call the very poor") "shall have a permanently greater command over the necessaries and luxuries of life?" Gifts she perceives to be no true remedy, though she fails to assign the economic reason, which is that the possession of outside resources enables the recipient to "go one lower" than his unendowed competitor in the battle for employment. The same objection does not apply to the workhouse, which withdraws the pauper from the battle altogether, but it does apply to outdoor relief, and is the one valid economic argument against it. The best charity—as Dr Johnson long ago pointed out—indeed, the only effectual charity, is to set a man to work at good wages. This is not,

however, Mrs Bosanquet's plan. "The less obvious, but more effective remedy is to approach the problem by striking at its roots in the minds of the people themselves; to stimulate their energies, to insist upon their responsibilities, to train their faculties. In short, to make them efficient."[1]

Unfortunately the ill-nourished, ill clothed and ill taught cannot be made efficient. Moreover if we could make every one of them efficient, they would be no better off, financially in their efficient state than they are now, in their incompetence.[2] While rare, efficiency, like a tenor voice, commands a monopoly price; if universal, its money worth would be no higher than that of the ability to read, which in the Middle Ages was a commercial asset of value. Furthermore, since extreme poverty destroys efficiency, these ill paid efficient persons would presently become, like our poorer manual labourers of to-day, weak of brain and of body, dull, languid, inert and therefore bad workers.

Thus efficiency, however desirable upon

[1] The Strength of the People. By Helen Bosanquet, p. 114.

[2] Of course efficiency is valuable for other than financial reasons; but we are dealing now only with the question of payment.

other grounds, is no economic remedy for underpayment. Not inefficiency but poverty is the real disease, and since poverty is an inevitable result of unlimited competition in labour, the disease can only be cured by some interference with the free course of competition. How to apply such interference effectually is the real problem which organised society has to solve. Towards its solution Mrs Bosanquet, able though she is, offers no assistance, because she never acknowledges the character of the problem. For her there are only inefficient people to be taught better, not underpaid people to be paid better. In this respect she represents a considerable school of thought and therefore it has seemed worth while to examine her thesis at some length; especially since any writer is pretty sure of welcome who preaches a doctrine so soothing to the general conscience. Much sympathetic distress would be spared to all of us, and much racking of anxious brains to a few, if it were but possible to believe with Mrs Bosanquet that the poor are themselves the architects of their own poverty and that they must themselves be its physicians. Unfortunately this is not the case. The process of cheapening described above is, in a state of

unlimited competition, absolutely inevitable; and neither talent nor industry can exempt from it any isolated worker whose qualifications do not create for him some sort of monopoly.

CHAPTER VIII

LABOUR AS A COMMODITY

What is a "fair wage"—Two meanings of "worth"—What work costs to the worker—Work done below cost price—How the worker may lose upon his work—The effect upon commodities in general of free competition—The effect upon labour—The robber employer—Eventual powerlessness of the single employer—Cost to the nation of the underpaid worker—Difference in essence between labour and other commodities—Ambiguity of word "law"—Recognition of the true cost of labour the basis of reform.

THERE are few phrases more current than those which include the expression "a fair wage." All workers conceive that they have a right to it; and I never met an employer who did not maintain that he paid it—although I have met more than one who admitted that his "fair wage" was one upon which the worker who received it could not live. To any enquirer venturing to point out this peculiarity, the reply is given: "But the work is not worth more," and the reply generally silences the enquirer for the moment—whereby the employer comes to believe it unanswerable.

In the enquirer's mind two questions

eventually arise: "Can a wage be fair upon which the worker cannot live?" and: "Has labour a worth measurable otherwise than by the market price?"

We begin presently to perceive that there are two faces to that word "worth"; that it represents sometimes the price to the buyer and sometimes the cost to the worker. The price to the buyer—the "worth" of the work in the answer quoted above—is neither more nor less than its market price, or, in other words, the price brought about by the balance of competition between those who want to buy labour and those who want to sell it. This price is regulated solely by the numbers competing on either hand and by their greater or less degree of combined action. But the cost of work to the worker is the expenditure of energy which he has made upon it. Every hour's work of a man or woman takes out of that man or that woman a certain fixed amount of strength, of energy,—in short, a certain amount of life. When we work, we spend, literally, something of our substance. To make up that expenditure, we must have both a certain amount of nourishment and a certain amount of rest. If our work is not paid at such a rate as to give us that, we lose something in

every hour we work. We spend a little more life than is restored to us. Even if we are paid at a rate that enables us just to make up what we have spent, we have earned nothing—we have only had our outlay repaid to us. The purchaser who pays a worker just enough to make him as fit for work afterwards as before, has only paid the worker's expenses; he has not yet begun to pay him for his work. The worker in such a case is precisely in the position of a capitalist who has lent money, and got it back, but has made no profit on its use.

The wage of much labour in this and in other countries is on that scale. So accustomed, indeed, are we to this state of things that many of us think a worker quite well paid if he receives enough to keep him in good bodily condition. Yet the same people who hold this opinion in regard to that labour which is the sole capital of the worker, consider themselves to have made a very bad bargain if they so invest their pecuniary capital as to receive no interest upon it. It would be well if we should bear in mind that the worker who receives no more than enough to make up the strength expended, is in exactly that financial position.

But there is a financial stage lower than this: the stage of the worker who not only gets no interest upon his capital, but does not get even back the whole of his capital. That labour is so often yielded for less than its cost is one reason why a working man's expectation of life is considerably less than that of a professional man; or, to put it in other words, why the dock labourer and the omnibus conductor die younger than the lawyer and the clergyman.

There are two ways in either (or both) of which any worker may lose upon his work, and the names of them are Long Hours and Low Wages. For instance, a railway company or an omnibus company that keeps a man at work for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four uses up more of that man's vitality than the other eight hours can restore. Though he were to be paid, like Miss Edna May, at a salary of £200 a week he would still lose on the bargain. At no price can his employers repay him. They have consumed some of his capital, and capital of that sort when once spent is spent for ever.

Or the worker may receive for each hour's work, even though the stretch of hours be not unduly long, too little money to pay for those

necessaries by which alone his outlay can be made up. On each transaction he pays out a little more than is returned to him. He becomes, at each step, a little poorer in bodily resources; he is never quite sufficiently fed, never quite sufficiently clothed nor healthily housed, and he never has that reasonable certainty of to-morrow's provision which goes so far towards giving peace of mind and health of body. Finally, like other persons who spend more than they receive, he becomes bankrupt; that is to say, he either dies several years earlier than the average of men who are better paid, or he sinks into the invalid condition of the pauper. "Labour," says Mr Schoenhof, "is an expenditure of vital force. Unless this is replaced by wholesome nutrition (air, light, sanitation and even cheerful surroundings are part of wholesome nutrition) the frame will work itself out and the labour will become economically of smaller and smaller value." [1]

The cost, then, of labour as a commodity is the cost of the worker's existence, a cost paid by the worker not in money, but in exhaustion, in hunger, in actual flesh and blood. This is the point in which labour

[1] Economy of high wages, p. 392.

differs from every other commodity, and the reason for which it should not be treated in the same way as other commodities.

In regard to all commodities, the tendency of free competition is, as we all know, to bring down the selling price to a figure very little above the cost of production; and in regard to all commodities other than labour, it is easy enough to see that this result is advantageous to the buyer. It is less easy to see, but is probably no less true that, in the long run, it is advantageous also to the seller, and that every hindrance to free competition in goods tends to diminish the volume of production and consequently that of human enjoyment.

But when we come to consider that exceptional commodity, labour, we find a different result ensuing from free competition; we find the inevitable consequences to be impoverishment of the seller, deterioration of the product and increase of human misery. The underpaid worker is not only inevitably wretched and inevitably unhealthy; he is also a danger and a burden to the country in which he lives. Since he—or more often she—receives less than a living wage for his work, and since he continues to live, it is

obvious that some one else is in part supporting him.

I can never forget the impression made upon me in the first factory which I ever visited by a little scene of which I was a silent witness. The head of the firm had shown us over various departments, and incidentally had talked of how some of his children had just gone to the other side of the world in a yacht. He was himself a man beginning to be elderly, well grown, well groomed, fresh coloured, speaking with an educated accent and presenting that air of prosperous content which is common with elderly business men who are making money. He presently took us into a department where very young and very poor-looking little girls were employed; and one of our party shyly asked what were their wages. "Four shillings a week," was the answer. The first speaker, himself an employer who pays high wages by choice, said deprecatingly: "But—surely—they can't live on that?" "Oh, no!" returned their employer, cheerfully. "They live at home with their parents." And I, new, then, to the facts of commercial life, stood staring, silent, at this well fed gentleman, with sons and daughters of his own, who

frankly confessed that poor men's daughters had to be supported by their parents in order that he might have their work for less than it cost. He seemed to me to be owning himself a thief. And that, indeed, was exactly what he was—although, strangely enough, he failed to perceive the fact. He was committing a daily robbery upon persons too weak to withstand his demands. His being, however, a variety of robbery not recognised by the laws, he pursued his course not only unremorseful and unpunished, but with great profit, and died, leaving behind him a large fortune which only a small minority of his fellow countrymen consider to have been disgracefully acquired. Yet his course was attended with much more suffering to other people than that of any highwayman. It was akin rather to that of the mediæval baron who by force of arms extracted a reluctant toll from all his poorer neighbours. The girls submitted to the extortion because it is even worse to starve than to be robbed, and because they lacked the combination that might have enabled them to resist both robbery and starvation.

The individual worker whose skill is but the dexterity born of constant practice—the

worker, that is to say, who has no sort of monopoly—is no more able to regulate the payment of his services than an apple or a sack is able to regulate its market price. Nor, at a certain stage of the downward course, is any individual employer able to regulate it. It is, for instance, probable enough that at the present moment not the Brothers Cheeryble themselves could sell safety pins at a profit if they paid a living wage to the women who "cap" them.[1]

For, in the long run, the process of competition generally succeeds in filching from the employer that unfair profit which he had originally filched from the worker. It is now the public at large which, by paying for

[1] If, at this point, any reader should pause to ask: "What, then, ought the Brothers Cheeryble to do? Ought they to leave the selling of safety pins to some less scrupulous persons? Or ought they to go on underpaying the cappers?" I reply that the worthy twins should follow neither of these courses, but should bend their minds to inventing or getting invented a machine that would cap the pins even more cheaply, because much more expeditiously, than the hand workers. The reduction in the cost of production would then allow the payment of decent wages to the operators. Mechanical operations should be done by machines, and hand work should be reserved for those which demand individual variation or peculiar and special perfection. The capping of safety pins, which falls under neither of these heads, is emphatically an operation to which the human brain and hand should not be put.

safety pins a fraction less than they really cost, pockets the balance of the worker's living wage. For the manufacturer who desires to pay his workers better there are now two courses open; he must either, if he can, find out some improved method, which, by diminishing his other expenses, will allow him to pay higher for labour, or must combine with his fellow manufacturers to raise the selling price. In practice, he generally does neither of these things, but continues to take advantage of his workers and to say—not without some show of justification—that he cannot help it, and that they would be worse off if he gave up business. The public at large, meanwhile, though it automatically pockets the unfair profits, does not, in the long run, gain by the transaction. For the underpaid worker who fails to be wholly supported by the proceeds of his own labour is inevitably supported in part out of the pocket of some other person or persons. Moreover, both the health and the work of the underpaid worker presently deteriorates. He contributes less than he might and ought to the general wealth, and, by and by, when his health fails sufficiently, he becomes a charge upon the public. Finally, he dies

before his natural time, so that his country fails to receive the full natural return for those costly and unproductive years of childhood during which he was supported. Furthermore, his working life is one of continued hardship, fatigue and suffering. His existence is not an addition to, but a deduction from, the total general happiness, the rather that underpayment is a burden not only to its victim but also to the onlooker. No person of ordinary sensibilities can fail to be depressed by the knowledge that large numbers of his fellow citizens are struggling, to their physical, moral and mental detriment, in hopeless poverty. Yet this state of things arises inevitably if labour is left, like any other commodity, at the mercy of unrestricted competition.

This difference in kind, between labour and other commodities, is the justification of trade-unionism, and the explanation of how it is that a man can logically be at the same time a free trader and a trade-unionist. Except the trade-unionists and the professed socialists, however, no great body of persons seems to have perceived this peculiarity of labour; and while underpayment is very generally deplored, the various efforts of the benevolent are mostly

directed either towards supplementing inadequate wages or towards transferring the underpaid to other branches of work, rather than towards securing better payment for the work at present done. In the eyes of the average Briton, the settling of wages by free competition appears, for some unexplained reason, as a sacred and permanent principle. Perhaps, if this attitude could be exhaustively analysed, we should find at its root a vague respect for "the laws of political economy," which respect is, in the last resort, but the result of a confusion of mind about two aspects of the word "law." Laws in the moral world are, of course, different from laws in the scientific world. The moral (or social) law is a command; the scientific law merely a statement of effects. This we see, plainly enough, when the effects are material and immediate. We do not dream of regarding the law that fire burns as a command to put our fingers in the flame. But when we come to consider the results of wide-spread human action, we seem to ourselves to be in the region rather of morals than of science, and without clearly realising our attitude, we begin, many of us, to regard the laws that govern these matters rather as precepts to be obeyed than as

sequences to be avoided. The law that free competition in labour leads to starvation wages is a law of the same kind as the law that a dose of prussic acid leads to death; and the conclusion to be drawn in each case is that if we wish to avoid the result we must avoid the cause. Persons who are not desirous of committing suicide must abstain from prussic acid; persons who desire to see underpayment vanish must resist free competition in labour.

If the nature of labour were as generally apprehended as is the nature of prussic acid, the laws of our country (which are laws of the other kind—laws of command) would gradually be so altered as to prevent and punish that kind of robbery which was practised, for years, by that prosperous gentleman who, year after year, paid girls for their work at a trifle under a penny an hour, and died thereafter wealthy and highly respected. It is more than conceivable that persons now living may survive to a day in which wealth so accumulated will be held as discreditable as wealth accumulated by slave trading, and when the stealing of labour will be held no less criminal than the stealing of cash. The foundation upon which any such reform must rest will be the recognition that labour is a

commodity differing in its nature from every other commodity; and that while there is, intrinsically, no such thing as a fair price, there is, intrinsically, and in every case, such a thing as a fair wage.

PART II

THE MINIMUM WAGE

CHAPTER I

EXISTING CHECKS

How it is that some workers are not "sweated"—Non-competitive systems—Co-operation—Public services—Trade unions—Who is to blame for strikes?—How trade unions promote trade—Limits of their success—Factory Acts—How restriction raises wages—An example—How restriction drives the employer into better ways—Limit of legal restrictions in Great Britain.

If it be true that unlimited competition tends to reduce the wage earner to the lowest possible rate of subsistence, how does it happen, some reader may enquire, that under our present competitive system all wage earners are not, in fact, at that low level, but that, on the contrary, there are occupations in which wages tend steadily to rise.

The answer is that the course of competition among ourselves is not unchecked, and that, wherever concerted human action has interposed a check, the downward course of wages has been stayed. Nor, indeed, is the competitive system, though the most widely prevalent, the only system in existence among us.

A very considerable proportion of the trade of these islands is carried on not upon a competitive but upon a co-operative basis. The actual sales of goods made by industrial co-operative societies in the year 1904 amounted to £90,681,406,[1] and this total was "exclusive of the sums (amounting to £11,874,643 in 1904) representing the value of the goods produced by the productive departments of the wholesale and retail societies and transferred to their distributive departments." The membership of the various societies included in 1904 no less than 2,103,113 persons, an appreciable fraction of the population.

The great movement known as Industrial Co-operation has two forms: (*a*) Associations of Consumers; (*b*) Labour Copartnerships.

The theory of Associations of Consumers is simple in the extreme. It consists in the elimination and reduction of intermediate profits, and the purchase by the retail customer of goods as nearly as possible at prime cost. The method employed is to sell at the usual market price and to return the surplus in the form of a percentage upon the total of

[1] Industrial Co-operation. Edited by Catherine Webb, p. 242. These figures do not include middle-class joint stock associations such as the Army and Navy Stores

purchases—which percentage is usually called a dividend. The fund from which such payments are paid is "the fund commonly known as profit," and commonly retained under that name by the individual employer. Some writers have pointed out that this fund is in truth not profit but only savings. "'Wealth is not created, it is only economised by distribution'; but in co-operative distribution it is economised to such effect that, for the workers at any rate, it has appeared to create wealth where none existed nor could exist for them under the old system of competitive trading."[1] The "fund commonly called profit" is in fact "the margin between the prime cost of an article and the price paid for it over the counter by the individual customer." The appropriation of this margin, or of a considerable part of it, to the customer is a feature not only of stores belonging to working class members but also of such undertakings as the Civil Service or the Army and Navy Stores. In these instances, however, the method adopted is to diminish the selling price; and this slight difference of procedure has led to a wide difference of results. The ordinary customer of the middle-class stores

[1] Industrial Co-operation, p. 80.

feels himself, for the most part, but a purchaser at an exceptionally good and cheap shop; the customer at a store that follows the plan of the original Rochdale Pioneers feels himself the member of a community and the inheritor of a tradition. The fund, being collected in the hands of the society at large, is recognised more clearly as the property of all members alike; its destination is regulated by the governing body whom those members elect; and it forms a continual object lesson in political economy.

In these cases, it is clear to all persons who understand the processes, that competition has been checked. The margin no longer goes into an employer's pocket but returns to the customer; and since the working classes are the largest customers, most of it returns to them. In nearly all instances, however, a part of the fund is retained for public uses; few, indeed, are the societies that contribute nothing towards educational or federal purposes.

The other group of co-operators views its members not as consumers but as producers, and by this very fact narrows its range, since every human being is a consumer, but not all of us are, or can be, in the strict sense, producers. There must be clerks, distributors of

all kinds, policemen, organisers. The work of such persons is necessary and useful, but it does not produce, like that of the weaver or the engineer, an immediate and apparent increase in the wealth of the world. In theory, the early associations of producers were workers who combined themselves into self governed workshops and divided the profits of their labours. But this ideal is applicable only to industries demanding but a small outlay of capital, and such industries are always growing fewer. "The ideal . . . was modified; individual sympathisers outside the workshop were admitted as members . . . so too were societies of consumers. Thus, in place of the old self governing workshop, the modern copartnership workshop developed." Associations of this type have been rapidly growing in the last ten or twelve years, and during the last two or three have spread amazingly in Ireland. All sorts of industries are represented: baking, weaving (of cotton, wool and silk), spinning, building, printing, quarrying, dairying, sick nursing, typewriting, cab-driving and bookbinding among them; there are societies that make wearing apparel of various sorts, pianos, harness, nails, mineral waters, photographs, brushes, watches, cutlery, padlocks and

bricks. "Desborough, with its two important productive societies and its flourishing store which owns much of the land and has built most of the houses, is almost a co-operative community."

Of the great English and Scotch Wholesale Societies made up of federations of societies, of the annual conferences, the annual festivals, the Women's Co-operative Guild—that greatest and most interesting of working women's associations—it is not my business here to speak in detail. Readers who desire to become acquainted with co-operation as it exists to-day should procure *Industrial Co-operation*.[1]

It must be enough to say that in the ocean of commercial competition, co-operation lies like a fertile island inhabited by workers who are putting into their own pockets the profits of their buying and selling, and very often also of their labour.

Nor is industrial co-operation the only part

[1] In order to do so readers must address themselves to the Co-operative Union, 2 Nicholas Croft, High St., Manchester. It is much to be regretted that so valuable and informing a work should be published in a manner that almost restricts its influence to persons who are already convinced co-operators. The outer world of readers who badly need to understand the facts and meanings of the great co-operative movement have no opportunity of meeting with the one volume that compendiously explains the existing conditions.

of the nation's business carried on, in part at least, upon non-competitive principles. The whole civil service of any country, the army, navy, hospitals, museums, prisons, endowed schools and municipal undertakings of all kinds are examples of enterprises established on a non-competitive basis, although often influenced as regards internal management by competitive methods. In many of these cases, the payment of workers is fixed otherwise than by competition. Military and naval officers are not asked what is the lowest figure at which they will consent to serve their country; nor do we find in advertisements for town clerks or borough surveyors that preference will be given to candidates willing to accept a reduction of salary.

Even in the wider labour market, competition has not entirely a free course. It is checked by trade organisations, by Factory Acts and by Sanitary Acts. It is even checked in some slight degree by an uneasy feeling that it is not decent to let people work for us in return for obviously inadequate payment.

The avowed aim of trade unions is to check freedom of competition, with the object

of obtaining or maintaining for the workers a high level of pay and of comfort. Their attempted method has been, almost invariably, the establishment not of a fixed wage but of a minimum wage. A misconception upon this point is so deeply engrained in the mind of the ordinary middle class Briton that I entirely despair of being believed when I make this statement. If I should live to celebrate a hundredth birthday, I should expect still to hear in the last year of my life the words: "What I really can't bear about trade unions is that they insist upon all men being paid alike." Let it be repeated, once again, however vainly, that trade unions do not so insist. I have never known, nor heard of, any trade union that objected to any of its members getting paid as much above the minimum rate as they possibly could. What the union does forbid is the taking of wages below the minimum; and the reason of this prohibition will be clear to any person who has read the chapter: "How Underpayment Comes."

The means employed by trade unions for securing a minimum wage is the combined refusal of all members to work at any lower rate. In trades of skill, as distinguished from

trades of mere practice—trades that is to say which possess in some degree a natural monopoly—unions have often attained considerable success; and wherever they have done so, poverty has been in a measure checked. Not only have the members of the union themselves been comparatively well paid, but the fact of their being so has helped to raise the level around them. Thus, since national poverty is the greatest enemy of trade, the unions have almost invariably, and indeed inevitably, been promoters of trade and prosperity.

At this point the question "How about strikes?" becomes almost physically audible. Certainly, a strike, during its continuance, hinders trade and prosperity in exactly the same way as warfare does. It is in fact warfare on a lesser scale and—in our country—with restrictions upon the weapons that may be employed; and war is always an evil, though sometimes the lesser of two evils. In a strike, as in greater wars, responsibility rests upon both parties, but seldom in equal degrees. The apportionment of blame must largely depend upon the cause in which each is fighting. The employer, in nine cases out of ten, is fighting for cheap labour; the union

primarily for access to amenities of life which the employer enjoys already. In nine cases out of ten, therefore, the union is really fighting the battle of the whole nation, while the employer is fighting against it. Mr Schoenhof, a grave State official, sent by his own government to examine economic questions in Europe, declares of the acts of British trade unions that "economically these acts speak of a high degree of wisdom. On the other hand the attempts of the employing classes to depress the rate of wages show frequently an entire misapprehension of the principles under which production is conducted. Most of the strife would disappear if it were more fully recognised that a high rate of wages has all the time been the powerful lever to reaching the low cost of production which practically rules to-day in the industries of the United States."[1]

If therefore that combatant is to be held most responsible who is fighting in the worse cause, it is not the trade unionist but the employer, who, on the whole, is chiefly to be blamed for the occurrence of strikes.

There may, indeed, have been cases—I believe there has, in our own day and country,

[1] Economy of high wages, p. 63.

been at least one—in which a union has followed a mistaken course, has restricted output, and so lessened the volume of trade, and to that degree injured the country. In so far as unions have occasionally done this, they have been blind to the larger issues; but not so blind, even thus, as those employers who thought to cheapen production by lowering wages. Poverty, always and everywhere, hinders production; the wise employer desires to see more money in the pockets of working class purchasers, and the wise statesman more money in the pockets of working class taxpayers. Some day, when the history of Great Britain comes to be seen in the truer perspective of retrospect, it will be the leaders of trade unionism and the promoters of Factory Acts who will stand out among the real makers of this nation's wealth.

But trade unions have seldom been really successful among unskilled workers—precisely those who, having no natural monopoly, are most liable to the pressure of economic competition and most likely to be underpaid. Women workers, too, have always been difficult to organise; not primarily, as is sometimes supposed, because they are women; but partly because women, in our present

social state, expect to leave the labour market upon marriage, and therefore are comparatively indifferent about earning high wages; and partly because women have, as a rule, less of companionship with one another and of common social life out of working hours than men, and therefore less opportunity of that "talking over" of affairs out of which concerted action grows. Home workers are, of course, especially isolated; and the successful organisation of a union among unskilled female home workers would be an industrial miracle not looked for by the most sanguine toiler in the industrial field.

Co-operation and trade unionism have both been, in the main, working class movements, and both are examples of that curious inarticulate instinct for right collective action which seems to be inherent in the English democracy. From an assembly of average English artisans—I say, English, not British—you will not get logically reasoned statements; you will very seldom get a clear exposition of principles; but you will, very generally, get that main line of conduct which true principles and sound logic would dictate.

Not all the checks, however, in the course

of free competition have come from the workers. The direct interposition of the law was invoked and secured by men whose personal concern in the question was only that of fellow citizens. These men were actuated by a horror of the sufferings undergone by the poorest workers; they felt that moral order was outraged and the nation disgraced by the existing industrial conditions. Restriction of hours was the first check imposed by British law, which has shrunk hitherto from directly fixing a rate of wages.[1]

But since prolonged hours of labour are in fact but a form of diminished wages, the law has, as it were despite itself, led to a real, and often also to a nominal, rise of wages. The way in which this comes about was exemplified with singular completeness in a case that occurred some years ago in London. The managers of a girl's club, enquiring into the non-attendance of a certain member of the club, learned that her employer was giving

[1] Of course a minimum rate of wages and sometimes indeed a complete scale of wages has often been fixed by various local bodies or departments; but only when such bodies have been, directly or indirectly, employers of labour. Thus the duty of employers to pay a fair wage has been recognised, but not, as yet, the duty or the right of the State to enforce the payment.

every day to her and to her fellow workers a considerable number of articles to be made at home after the closing of the work room and to be brought in next morning. In order to complete this task, she was often, she declared, obliged to work till two in the morning. The articles were accessories of dress, and were paid for, by the dozen, at such a rate that the girls (there were seven of them) earned each about seven shillings a week, or about 1s. 2d. a day for a working day of from 14 to 16 hours. The ladies of the club reported the case to the Women's Industrial Council, the members of which knew—as the girls did not—that the Factory Act forbade such employment at home after a working day on the employer's premises. Now this, it will be seen, was just the kind of case in which, to people who have but little industrial experience, the interference of the law seems harsh, and its strict enforcement disastrous. If, working 14 to 16 hours a day, these poor girls earned but 1s. 2d., how cruel to let them work but 10 hours, and so earn but ninepence or tenpence! The Women's Industrial Council, however, ruthlessly reported the facts to the Factory inspectors; and one evening, shortly afterwards, a lady inspector appeared at the workshop door just

as the girls were leaving. Each girl carried a parcel. The inspector enquired the contents, and on learning them, turned the girls back and made each leave behind her the work which should have occupied her until after midnight. She herself interviewed the employer and no doubt expounded to him the provisions of the Act. Next morning—or possibly a day or two later—this ingenious gentleman presented to his employees a statement for their signature which declared that they carried home work to be done, not by themselves but by their relatives. They all signed; girls who work part of the night as well as all day and who receive but seven shillings a week are not persons likely to have spirit for much resistance. But they told the club leaders, and the club leaders told the Women's Industrial Council, and the Industrial Council hastened to tell the Factory inspectors. Again the lady inspector appeared and met the girls coming out with parcels. Again she bade them return the work, and again she went in and saw their employer. What she said to him can only be surmised; for neither Factory inspectors nor employers report these things to the outer world. Whatever it may have been, it was effectual. No

more work was given out to be carried home and the girls were thenceforward able to spend their evenings, if they chose, at the club and their nights in sleep. But, at the week's end, every girl had done much less work, and being paid at the usual piece work rate, received considerably less than her weekly average. Thereupon, they represented to their employer their hard case. The inspector had forbidden them to work at night, and they could not live upon the proceeds of their work by day. Would he therefore be pleased to raise their pay; otherwise, they would be obliged to seek work elsewhere. The employer did raise their wages, paying them at a rate per dozen which, while still but a very few pence, was yet somewhere between 40 and 45 per cent. higher than he had paid before. Nor was this all. Finding that seven girls were now unable to accomplish all his work, he enlarged his workshop and took on six more. There were now therefore thirteen girls at work instead of seven, and all thirteen were receiving wages a shade higher for ten hours' work than the seven had received for about fifteen hours. Nor did the retail selling price of the goods advance by so much as the fraction of a penny. In such ways as this do legal checks tend to impede the course

of free competition and to prevent the extremity of underpayment.

It is not, however, only by preventing undue hours of labour but also by insisting upon reasonable sanitary conditions that the law promotes better wages and improved trade. An employer who can no longer either overwork or overcrowd his "hands" is driven to seek other channels of saving. He demands some method of getting more work done in an hour, and finds it worth his while to pay for the best possible machinery. All sorts of improved processes are introduced, some of which may demand increased skill and attention from the workers. The workers as soon as they have leisure enough to think, and health enough to develop initiative, begin to insist upon better payment, and because they are better paid are able to respond to demands for better work. The improved methods of production, where introduced, lead to an increase of production which renders possible a lowering of selling price, while the rise in wages at the same time increases the buying power of the workers. Trade expands and finds a ready outlet.[1]

[1] It may be worth noting here—though the point lies outside the scope of this chapter—that an expansion of trade

The profits of the manufacturer, in these circumstances, are greatly increased, no longer at the cost of increased hardship to the workers but with advantage to the whole community. Thus the law has already, in various ways, interfered with the free course of competition, and its interference has been beneficial all round. The grounds of its intervention have always been moral; legislators and constituents alike have felt that certain evils must be suppressed at whatever loss of profits or of trade. But the results have been, not only morally but also economically, of immense national benefit. Slowly the great truth is emerging into recognition that the enforcement of good conditions and good payment for the workers of a nation is not only the humane but also the profitable policy. Slowly, step by step, in that piecemeal, groping and wasteful manner which seems to be a part of the English nature, and which, while so maddening to some of us who happen to possess an infusion of more logical but hotter blood, yet, on the whole, works out so well

when wages do not rise leads to the extraordinary state known as overproduction, in which producers complain that they cannot find a market for their wares, at the same time that hundreds of fellow citizens are seen to be in crying need of these same wares.

in practice, the British law goes forward, setting check after check in the path of unlimited competition. Almost every step has been taken amid outcries of opposition and prophecies of ruin. At every advance, the "practical man" has assured the government of the day, beforehand, that his particular trade would be destroyed, and, afterwards, that he had lost nothing.

In spite of all these steps and all these consequences, the vast majority of English people still believe themselves to be living under a *régime* of pure competition and are ready to declare such a *régime* not only beneficial but inevitable. In fact, however, modern life, even in our own small islands, comprises not one *régime* only but many. Every stage, from a modified feudalism up to an almost undiluted socialism, is represented by existing conditions in Great Britain. Some stages are dwindling; some are growing; and it is well within the power of concerted human action to determine which shall grow and which shall dwindle.

As far as we have gone, our law has directly stopped many gross forms of overwork and oppression. The homeworker it has helped, if at all, only in so far as it has enforced

certain provisions as to housing and sanitation. Indirectly, the Factory Acts have served to raise wages by forming a basis of minimum comfort upon which trade union organisation could be built. In Great Britain, the law has never yet intervened, directly and of set purpose, to raise wages. In parts indeed of Greater Britain the law has directly so intervened; but the history of that intervention belongs to another chapter.

CHAPTER II

SUPPOSED REMEDIES

Emigration—Valuable to the individual—Useless for the community—Assumed improvidence of early marriage—Drunkenness cause of individual poverty, not of general poverty—The amazing thrift of working people—Dangers of thrift—Observations of a sagacious Scotchman—Consumers' Leagues—Why impracticable as remedy for underpayment—Fields in which a Consumers' League may be of use.

THE evils described in the first part of this volume are no new ones; they have been familiar for many years to many persons; a variety of remedies have been suggested and in many cases attempted. Of these remedies, only those are in any degree effectual which act as checks upon competition. One group of proposed remedies is founded upon the assumption that the country is overpopulated. This assumption, is, however, disproved by the fact (which is unquestioned) that notwithstanding the presence among us of a large class of rich non-producers, the national income has increased at a greater rate than the

population of the country. Still, there are persons who believe that England has too many people and who, therefore, very logically, desire to reduce the number.

Some reformers of this way of thinking desire to see fewer births; others desire the removal, to parts of the world where population is still sparse, of those persons who, in this country, are seen to be vainly struggling for remunerative employment. Emigration has, no doubt, in many individual cases, meant a change from indigence to prosperity; but, as a remedy for general indigence, it has the fatal flaw that every worker removed is also a consumer removed, and that every consumer removed means the loss of a customer and, therefore, to that extent, a diminution of trade. The supply of labour is, indeed, lessened, but the demand for labour's product, and thus for labour itself, is lessened too. It would be better for British trade if the emigrant could be made prosperous at home instead of being sent to seek prosperity in exile. It is, however, true that most emigrants go to British colonies, and that these colonies need them. For these reasons, emigration is, no doubt, useful, but as a remedy for general poverty at home it must always remain de-

lusive. Moreover, so long as the immigration of foreigners is permitted, the emigration of British subjects is in effect little more than a game of "General Post."

Another school of reformers holds the poor themselves responsible for their own poverty. "Why do they marry so young?" "Why do they drink?" "Why don't they save?" These questions are heard at every turn; and persons who do not know the life of the poor regard them as unanswerable.

To take first the question of early marriages, a point upon which the better off are apt to judge with singular unfairness of their poorer brethren. The market value of the middle class man is probably highest after 40, certainly after 30. The market value of the average workman, on the other hand, decreases after 40, if not earlier, and, in a vast number of cases, is as high at 22 as it will ever be. Therefore, while the middle class man is in a financial sense, prudent in deferring marriage till 30 or thereabouts, the workman would be foolish indeed to delay the birth of his eldest children until within ten years or so of his own decline in market value. The workman who desires, like the middle class man, that the infancy and school-

time of his children shall coincide with his own period of greatest prosperity should marry—as in fact he does—between the ages of 20 and 24. Then, by the time that the father begins to experience increasing difficulty in getting well paid employment—or perhaps employment at all—the elder children will at least be of an age to earn for themselves. It should be remembered, too, that work-people as a class die younger than people who are better off, so that a bricklayer, married at 20, and a barrister, married at 30, have about even chances of seeing the manhood of their elder sons—another reason why the former is wise to marry early, if at all. Early marriages, then, whether improvident or no in the case of middle class brides and bridegrooms, are not improvident in the case of working people—unless indeed it be contended that it is improvident for working people to marry at all—a contention fraught with rather alarming possibilities to the future of the race.

To the question: "Why do they drink?" the answer is not quite so simple. One may begin by remarking that there are a great many total abstainers among wage earners; one may also remark that, if drinking were

as universal among wage earners as, let us say, the wearing of boots, even the lowest rate of wages would stand at a figure allowing for the purchase of drink. Economically, it is because the majority of wage earners do not drink to excess that the excessive drinker finds himself at a disadvantage. Of course, he is at a disadvantage also in various other respects, but these do not enter into the economic argument. That intemperate drinking may conduce to poverty is undeniable; but that poverty also often conduces to intemperance is no less true. Of the two kinds of drunkenness that exist among wage earners one is largely in the nature of an escape from fatigue and from despair. Of the other—the outbreak at intervals of the able, energetic and often comparatively prosperous man, I do not pretend to have fathomed the mystery; but it seems likely that the monotony of modern working life and the lack of abundant personal interests may be among the contributory causes. It may also be noted that to carouse at intervals was a deeply rooted habit among our Northern ancestors, who admired a man potent in drinking as they admired a man powerful in fight. It is at least conceivable that the energetic, capable

man who "breaks out" every month or two is a survival of the old type; and it certainly seems to be the case that this type does not occur among purely Latin races. Be this as it may, experience shows convincingly that, on the whole, in this country, any and every class of workers grows by degrees more sober as its hours of work are shortened and its wages raised. Individuals of the class may still drink heavily, but the average of sobriety steadily rises with improved conditions. Moreover, in spite of the temptations presented by poverty, a steady rise in the sobriety of this country is shown by the excise returns. If poverty spreads and deepens—as I fear it does—the cause cannot be found in an increase of drunkenness; for the consumption of drink per head grows yearly less and less. Temperance is doubtless advantageous in many ways to those who practise it; but, like efficiency, it possesses a money value only while it fails to be universal. If every man were temperate, no employer would make a point of retaining his temperate "hands" when reducing his establishment.

To the question: "Why do not working people save?" truth requires the paradoxical

reply that they do save, and that they cannot afford to do so. As a class, working people save a larger proportion of their income than any other class of the community. The shares in Industrial Co-operative Societies amounted in 1904 to £27,739,123; the Reserve and Insurance funds of the same societies to £2,677,420. The great Friendly and Provident Societies are supported almost wholly by working class contributors; and, in addition to these, the majority of Trade Unions are also provident Societies.[1]

Of the thirty families whose household expenditure has been tabulated in Vol. I. of Mr Booth's *Life and Labour* (East London), only five spent nothing upon insurance or club money; and in one household this item ran up to 11½ per cent. of the whole expenditure. Considering that the weekly income, as estimated, ranged from about 10s. 3½d. to about 33s. 7d. and that the households consisted seldom of less than four, and in one case of eight persons, these contributions are by no means trifling. Yet it is probable that not two families out of the

[1] Mr Charles Booth's tables show that in 1889, out of a population of 891,539, in East London, there were no less than 47,225 members of various Friendly Societies.

thirty were able to make anything like an adequate provision for old age. It hardly, indeed, requires demonstration that a person earning just enough to support life can only make an adequate provision for his old age by laying by 100 per cent. of his income. Upon 10s. a week, or less, the saving of money becomes something very near to a slow form of suicide. Moreover, at the risk of horrifying every middle class reader, I must frankly declare that, in my opinion, a worker does more wisely to abstain from all forms of thrift beyond participation in his trade union and his co-operative society. His union will help to keep up his wages; his co-operative society will increase their purchasing power; the return upon both these investments is immediate and certain: but anything more is apt to cost too dear. It is now a good many years since an old Scotchman of great intelligence and judgment, the secretary of his trade union, a member of the municipal council, and justly respected by his fellow townsmen of various ranks, gave me his opinion on this subject. He related to me how, as a young man, he had accompanied a benevolent gentleman to a lecture upon thrift, and how, as they afterwards walked away, the gentleman waxed

eloquent upon the duty of every man to lay by. But my old friend, canny even at five-and-twenty or so, replied that he was a married man with two children, that his earnings were two pounds a week, that, if he spent less, either his children must go short of what was necessary to make them strong, healthy and well trained, or he himself must go short of what was necessary to maintain his efficiency; and that, in his belief, the best form of thrift for a man in his position was to maintain the highest standard of living which his small total income would secure. In his case the plan had fully succeeded. He was, I suppose, well over sixty, as hale, as active and as much interested in the progress of the world as any man of thirty, and a most valuable citizen. His children had both grown up healthy, capable and industrious; both were skilled workers, regularly employed and in receipt of good wages. But supposing —and his trade was one reputed unhealthy— that the father had died, leaving a widow and young children unprovided for? We may note that his risk of doing so was lessened by his being better fed and better clothed than his more sparing neighbour. Still, death is liable to seize even the best nourished and the

most fitly clothed; he might have died long before his children had completed their excellent education or become capable of self support. Even in that case, however, would these orphans, in whom a foundation had been laid of good health and good teaching, have been really worse off than if, with a poorer endowment of personal advantages, they had inherited the money pittance—so sadly inadequate at best—that their father might have scraped together in his few years of life? For how miserably small is the provision that *can*, even with the utmost exercise of parsimony, be made out of a family income of two pounds a week! In their inevitably inadequate efforts to make such provision, workers too often deny themselves the absolute essentials of healthy living. To abstain from buying new shoes in order to save the price for one's old age, and then to die of pneumonia, induced by want of sound shoes, is but a doubtful form of thrift, both for oneself and one's nation. The interests of the nation, especially, are certainly better served by the maintenance among working class families of the highest attainable standard of life than by the accumulation of very small individual provision for possible orphans or

possible old age. Even two pounds a week will not suffice (except in remote country districts—where no man earns so much) to provide really very good food, clothing and housing for four persons; and the working class family does not often consist of no more than four. The present cost of thrift, as thrift is generally understood, is too heavy and the future return too light; and the wise man is not he who saves his money, but he who spends it to the best advantage.

The supposed remedies hitherto touched upon have been measures demanding the agency of the wage earner himself; but there is another scheme, particularly attractive to the inexperienced reformer, in which the consumer is to be the active person. When men and women who are not themselves underpaid come face to face with the evil of underpayment, it is natural enough for them to resolve that henceforth the articles purchased by themselves shall be articles the makers of which have been adequately paid. From this individual resolve it is but one step to an association of persons all thus resolved, and banded together for the purposes of investigation and exclusive dealing. Such an association is a "Consumers' League," the aim of

which is "to check unlimited competition not at the point of manufacture but at the point of sale." Such associations, the first of which was formed, I believe, in consequence of a suggestion made by myself, many years ago, in *Longman's Magazine*, are likely to reappear at a time like the present when many consciences are disturbed by recognition of the fact that a considerable proportion of British workers are scandalously underpaid. It seems desirable, therefore, to point out how and why a Consumers' League must inevitably fail in its aims.

The complexities of modern commerce are such that it is absolutely impossible for any group of purchasers, however large and however earnest, to attain that accurate knowledge of myriads of facts which would be necessary; or, even, supposing such knowledge to have been once obtained, to keep abreast of the unceasing changes. Let us take the comparatively elementary problem of the large retail drapery shops. It appears to be the general practice in such establishments for each separate department to be under separate management, and for the head of each department to have a free hand, subject to the one condition of producing a certain percentage of

profit. The ability to manage successfully and develop a large branch of trade is not, as may well be believed, very common, and one part of the payment that it demands is freedom to do its work in its own way. Thus it is not uncommon for one department of a large business to be conducted in a spirit of justice and consideration, while another is marked by the total lack of such a spirit. For instance, there was at one time, in a certain firm, a manager of the mourning department who was among the best employers in the London trade; but at the same time, the man in charge of the workshop in which certain garments were made up or altered, was a cutter-down of wages, rude and bullying in his behaviour to the workers and entirely inconsiderate of their comfort. What reply, in a case like this, can be given to a lady who asks: "Can I safely go to X's shop?" How, if she is furnished with the information just given, can she discriminate, or how, even if she did, can she or her informant be sure of the continuance of these conditions? Six months later, the one manager may have taken a better post, and the other have been dismissed. The new man at the workshop may be an enlightened organiser, who intro-

duces improved machinery and methods, knows the value of contented and well fed workers, and raises wages; while the new man at the mourning department may have been trained in the ways of "a driving trade," and may believe good management to consist in harrying his employees, in nibbling at their wages and in "cribbing" their leisure. If we multiply these facts by the number of shops or departments touched by the weekly purchases of any well-to-do customer, we shall begin to have some conception of the scale upon which a Consumers' League would have to conduct its investigations.

Moreover, all this is only on the uppermost plane. Few of these retailers manufacture the goods sold. In regard to every single article it becomes necessary to trace every step of production and transmission. A pair of shoes cannot be satisfactorily guaranteed until we have discovered the wages and conditions of employment not only of every person who has worked upon the actual shoe, but also of the tanner, the thread weaver and winder, the maker of eyelets, the spinner and weaver of the shoe-lace and the various operatives engaged upon the little metal tag at the shoe-lace's end. Nor is the matter finished even

tlen. At every stage of its evolution, a shoe requires the services of clerks, book-keepers, office-boys, warehousemen, packers, boxmakers, carmen, railway servants &c., and each new service introduces other material and other service—paper, ink, ledgers, harness, stable fittings, cardboard, string, glue, iron, coal—the series is endless. Yet compared with a woman's completed gown, or a man's suit of clothes, how simple a product is a pair of shoes. The fact is that even the most apparently simple of commercial acts is but one link in a network that spreads over the whole field of life and labour; and the fabric of that network is not woven once and for ever, but is in continual process of change.

At the present stage, then, of our commercial development it appears absolutely impossible for a Consumers' League to fulfil its aims. If labour were thoroughly organised in every branch, so that a strong trade union existed in every trade, capable of giving information upon every point, then indeed a Consumers' League might become truly efficient, but it would become proportionately superfluous.[1]

[1] This explanation of the impracticability of a Consumers' League is reprinted, with the alteration of a few words, from

The cure of underpayment needs to be applied at the point of payment; and the establishment of a legal minimum wage is the most direct method of application.

But although a Consumers' League can never hope to counteract the results of unlimited competition, it may, as the National Consumers' League of America shows, exert a valuable influence upon public opinion, and may succeed in remedying certain industrial scandals. The Report of that body for the year 1905-6 (up to March 6, 1906) is a most interesting pamphlet, full of details that show how useful may be the work, as industrial detectives and agitators, of a group of citizens, banded together for the purpose of exposing and abolishing oppressive and insanitary conditions of labour. In a country where public feeling is not yet nearly ready for the enactment of a minimum wage, the formation of a Consumers' League may possibly be the best step forward. An effectual remedy it cannot be; but it undoubtedly affords means of education, both for its members and for the community at large. In our own country, however, where the evils are already more or

the Supplement to the *Guardian*, the Editor of which has given me leave to reproduce it in this chapter.

less generally recognised, and where an increasing number of persons are already beginning to hope for a minimum wage, the Consumers' League marks a stage that has been left behind.

'We see, then, that emigration, though it may help the individual, can but affect the trade of the country injuriously; that temperance, while eminently desirable on other grounds, is only of any economic value because it is still not universal; that effectual thrift is absolutely impossible for the underpaid, and that the exercise of even an illusory thrift can only be achieved by a sacrifice of things essential to good health. We see, furthermore, that a Consumers' League may be a valuable social agency, but can never hope to be an economic remedy for underpayment. Having looked up all these turnings and found all of them blind alleys, we now proceed to examine a road along which younger sisters of ours have travelled already, and at the end of which a ray of hope seems to be shining. But before entering upon this examination we will pause to consider the lesson of facts as presented in the history of our own cotton trade.

CHAPTER III

THE LESSONS OF THE COTTON TRADE

The pessimist view—False assumption on which it rests—Cotton trade not natural to Britain—Climate—Temperature—Wallacy of inherited skill—Cotton workers as they were—Advancing legal restrictions—Rise of wages—Amazing development and prosperity of the British trade—Change in the mills—Change in the workers—Change in the employers—The case of Bristol—The verdict of Mr Schoenhof.

MANY people who would gladly see working people better paid, honestly believe that a general rise in wages is not commercially possible. Any attempt at giving a fair wage all round would, they declare, so diminish trade as to throw out of work an additional number of persons whose added competition would inevitably reduce the average wage to below its original level: or who, if their competition were effectually barred by the existence of a legal minimum wage, would be left without employment, in a state more wretched than before. It may be remarked that this view involves an admission that we live under commercial conditions which render dishonesty

nōt only the best, but actually the only possible, policy. Such a belief would appear to furnish an unanswerable argument in favour of the destruction of such commercial conditions, and it is difficult to understand how any human being can hold it and not become a convinced revolutionist. Yet, strange to say, it is from the mouth of upholders of things as existing, that this doctrine is most frequently heard. In some quarters, indeed, there would seem to be actual hostility to the idea of bettering the workman's lot, an inclination to grudge him any greater share than he now possesses of the comforts and conveniences of modern life. This attitude—to some extent, it must be supposed, a feudal survival—indicates a very ugly spirit of class selfishness which may possibly be dangerous, and is certainly ignorant. Dull, indeed, must be the man or woman upon whom modern conditions of life do not impress the closeness of human interdependence. Never, since the beginnings of history, has the daily life of every man been so wonderfully interwoven with that of all his fellows: never was there a time when the deeds of each were so much a part of his neighbour's pains or pleasures. Consider for a single moment how changed would be one's

own life, if there were no longer in Great Britain any person very poor, very dirty or very ill mannered, if, in short, no one fell below the standard of that skilled artisan class which is not only the most solidly virtuous, but also, in essentials, the most truly courteous section of our society. Is there one of us, however selfish, however callous, from whose daily existence a burden would not be lifted?

Yes, the pessimist will say, the change would be delightful, but it is not possible. That very interdependence of which you speak makes the whole world but one market, and renders it impossible for any one country to raise wages while other countries keep theirs low. This alleged impossibility rests, it will be observed, upon the assumption that higher wages conduce to higher selling prices, an assumption which experience shows to be fallacious. And since it is always more convincing, especially, perhaps, to the British mind, to narrate what has happened than to declare what must happen, the purposes of my argument will be best served by a brief account of the English cotton trade.

Before entering upon this, let me point out how very remarkable a phenomenon it is

that there should exist an English cotton trade at all. We cannot grow the required material: every ounce of raw cotton has to be imported at a price, imported too from a great distance, and owing to its bulky nature, at comparatively a high heavy cost. Originally the possession of coal, iron and a seaboard gave advantages to England: the factory system developed early with us, and we manufactured cotton, as we manufactured other goods, because our energies were turned towards manufacture in general. But the same influences which caused mechanical production to begin here have caused it to arise elsewhere, and the natural development of industry must, one would suppose, eventually carry the manufacture of cotton to regions where cotton can be grown, especially if they happen also to possess the means of motive power. The Southern States of America, where cotton grows, where coal and water power are plentiful, and where population is no longer sparse, would seem to be marked out by nature as the home of the cotton industry. And in fact mills are rapidly rising in that region. Not only so, but the workers in them are employed for much longer hours and paid at a far lower rate per hour than English

cotton workers. Readers of the chapter upon child labour, in Part I. of this volume, will be aware that children are working, both by day and by night, in these mills, whereas no child may work full time in any English mill, nor any child or woman at night. Yet these Southern mills, with every advantage of position, with cheap labour, and comparatively cheap land, have not succeeded, and are not succeeding, in winning from the English their immense preponderance in the markets of the world. This undeniable fact is explained in some quarters as being due to our much abused English climate, which is said to provide exactly the degree of temperature and humidity most favourable to the manipulation of cotton yarn. That a very dry atmosphere will not suit some processes of the trade seems to be generally acknowledged, and if England were the only damp country in the world, or even the dampest, we might perhaps regard ourselves as possessing a sort of monopoly advantage. If, however, there be any one state of the atmosphere more favourable than any other for the manufacture of cotton, then it is quite impossible that our notoriously variable climate can always present it. Moreover, it seems to be the case that for

some processes at least, a combination of dampness with great heat is desirable: and this combination, natural to some countries, is actually forbidden by the English law. Countries possessing a climate at once hot and damp must, it would seem, have a natural advantage over us, and here again, the Southern States are favoured by nature.

Another explanation sometimes put forward is that the English workers, among whom the manufacture was first established, possess a hereditary skill of manipulation. The physiological possibility of such inheritance seems to be questionable: and, considering the great changes undergone by the machinery employed, the existence of it would be, at least, very surprising. Moreover, this supposed hereditary dexterity would require to have grown up in strangely few generations, since, in 1830 or so, the cotton workers of England are described as being deplorably poor workers, degenerate, physically and morally. Their condition, at that time and for a good many years afterwards, was appalling. A more horrible picture than that presented in Mr P. Gaskell's "Manufacturing Population of England," published in 1833, can hardly be conceived. These cotton operatives were, in

short, as unpromising in physique, in character and in industrial efficiency as any group of casual, irregularly employed labourers that could be selected to-day from the ranks of unorganised industry: as ill paid, as wretched and as much oppressed as any sweated home worker in a slum garret.

By slow degrees, from that first Act which, in 1802, made some faint attempt at shortening the hours of the unhappy parish apprentices, the law has gone on, steadily diminishing hours of work. From 1854 onward, the working week for women in textile trades became one of 60 hours. Within a few years later, these hours were reduced to 56½; and now, the legal week in the textile trades is one of 55½ hours. At all these stages, the regulations, though nominally affecting only women, have, in practice, decided the hours of men also. Thus, the British textile worker is employed for fewer hours than any foreign competitor. Wages, though not high for the individual, are, owing to the fact that nearly all its members work in the trade, high for the family. Rates of pay have steadily risen; the average nominal wage of 24s. 9d. for men in 1881—itself an immense advance upon the starvation rates of the thirties—had risen, in

1902, to 27s. 3d. For later years I cannot cite figures, but the amazing prosperity of the trade during the last year or two can hardly have failed to affect wages favourably.[1]

Moreover, these rises have coincided with a fall in the price of food so marked that the increase in average real wages, between 1881 and 1902, is reckoned to be more than 36%. The number of persons employed has also steadily grown, and the returns of the Chief Inspector of Factories show that in 1901 the industry gave occupation to 513,000 persons. The increase in the number of spindles and of looms, however, has been far greater than the increase in the number of hands. Machinery has made vast strides and becomes daily swifter and more economical of labour; so that the total growth of the trade, since the days of employers who vowed that a ten-hour day would ruin them, almost passes calculation. Moreover, the development of the industry tends more and more towards those branches which demand most skill. Our exports increase more largely in fabrics than in yarn, and most of all in coloured fabrics, the prices of which are rising. We are in

[1] A prominent employer writes to me in December 1906 that wages have since risen 2½ per cent.

short "specialising in the more expensive and difficult work." We are producing those really exquisite coloured cotton stuffs which under various fancy names have, during the last few years, made summer dresses so attractive, and which are well worth the comparatively high price at which they are bought.

On p. 61 of the pamphlet written by Professor S. J. Chapman for the Free Trade League[1] may be found a most interesting table of the comparative increase, all over the world, in the number of spindles, between the years 1870 and 1903. We find that "about a fifth of the total increase in the world's spindles in a third of a century has fallen to the United Kingdom. The whole of Europe, taken together in a period of industrial awakening, cannot boast a growth of cotton spindles more than twice as great as that which has taken place in this country alone, though in 1870 Europe was almost at the beginning of her cotton spinning, and has since then been fostering it. . . . In 1870 the American nation had a fifth as many spindles as the United Kingdom, and to-day she does not

[1] A Reply to the Report of the Tariff Commission on the Cotton Trade. Written for the Free Trade League by S. J. Chapman, M.A., Professor of Political Economy at the University of Manchester.

possess half as many as the United Kingdom." And this in spite of the fact that the population of the United States is so much larger than ours.

Another table (on p. 66) deals with exports of manufactured cotton goods, and compares the average annual exports, from 1891 to 1902, of Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The absolute increase of British exports in the year 1901-2 was £8,170,000; that of Germany, £4,100,000; and that of the United States, £325,000. All the remaining countries together totalled an increase of only £13,450,000, as against Britain's £8,170,000. The increase in German exports, which comes nearest to our own, is but slightly more than half of it. "Of the total trade (exporting) done by the chief Western trading nations, Great Britain accounts for 62·5%; Germany stands next with 12%." Moreover, these figures, reaching only to 1902, take no account of the vast prosperity of the cotton trade in Great Britain since: a prosperity of which some indication is given in the Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1905. From Oldham, Mr Crabtree reports that "About 20 new mills have been erected or are in course

of erection for the cotton spinning trade alone. These will contain about 2,000,000 spindles." (p. 147.) Mr Verney reports that "in the Rochdale district alone three new mills containing 220,000 spindles started in 1905, and at the end of the year there were nine more in course of construction to be equipped with 770,000 spindles. The total number of new mills which have commenced to run in 1905 and which are in course of erection throughout Lancashire is no less than 57, with 5,000,000 spindles. The signification of these figures may be better appreciated when it is remembered that in the whole of France there are but 6,000,000 spindles, and in Germany less than 9,000,000." (p. 147.) On the same page the following declaration, by Mr W. Tattersall, is quoted from "The Cotton Trade Circular": "The year's trading has been the most prosperous in the history of Lancashire."

On the whole, the story of the British cotton trade—a trade, be it remembered, the very existence of which is surprising—is the story of one of the most amazing developments in industrial history. Raw material that can only be grown in distant countries is brought, naturally enough, at first, to a land of coal and iron, the cradle of the factory system. By and by,

other countries, including some in which the raw material can be produced, begin, in their turn, to adopt the factory system and to manufacture cotton. What would naturally follow? Surely, the absorption of the English trade by the foreign competitor whom nature favours. Moreover, Britain, already handicapped by nature, had further handicapped herself by restricting hours of work and by imposing high and expensive standards of sanitation and safety. Yet what is seen to occur? England's trade goes on steadily expanding, year by year; wages rise, both nominally and, to a greater degree, really; and in the course of last year (1905) not only was all the available adult labour employed, but it was not possible to get enough of it, so that there was actually some increase in half-time labour, which previously had steadily declined.

Nor is the contrast less if we consider the mills themselves or the men and women connected with them. In the first third of the last century, the mills were, in general, dirty, ill ventilated, ill provided with sanitary accommodation, frequently overcrowded, the machinery unguarded and the temperature unregulated, so that the operatives suffered from extremes both of heat and of cold. At

the present day, there must be a certain cubic space for every worker, there must be proper sanitary accommodation, moderate temperature and—most important of all, perhaps, in this industry—there must be proper ventilation for carrying off the dust and fluff by which the lungs of so many cotton operatives have been injured. The old mills were full of overworked, underpaid children, stunted, wizened, and, if their contemporaries are to be credited, precociously vicious; children who dropped asleep at their looms, and had to be dragged, crying with sleepiness, from their beds to begin work again in the morning, while another relay of little serfs were actually waiting to enter the beds left vacant. The mills ran till late at night, sometimes all night long. Diseases of many kinds, especially phthisis and spinal deformities were rife; while drunkenness and immorality seem to have been rampant. The masters, many of whom were self made men, of little education, vowed that their profits were not large, and that any restriction of the hours of labour would inevitably land them in the Bankruptcy Court. The operatives, however, persisted in clamouring for relief; parliament granted it; and strange to say, instead of being ruined, the trade grew

better and better. The workers, seizing their chance, developed strong trade unions that included both men and women, and thus secured themselves against the disastrous results of free competition. Their union helped them to gain better wages; the law helped them to health and to leisure. In less than three generations, the cotton workers of North Western England have become intelligent, independent citizens. They are no longer oppressed, no longer illiterate and no longer vicious. Free libraries and co-operative stores grow and flourish, and the old English passion for music, still dormant in the South, is well awake in the large cotton towns of the North. In industrial efficiency the English spinners and weavers of cotton have no rivals. As the Tariff Commission reported, "Nearly every mill started abroad with English machinery requires a certain amount of British workpeople and overlookers to start it and to train up native labour." (Sec. 205.) This increase of skill, dependent very largely upon an improved standard of life, has rendered possible a vast improvement in methods of production, with the usual consequence of a greatly enlarged output. The masters, from whom the increasing stringency of the law has demanded an ever rising standard of capacity,

are men of a better class than their predecessors, and among the most enlightened of British employers.

Meanwhile, in other countries, many of the evils which Lancashire has left behind, still prevail. Children toil to-day in certain American mills, as they toiled once in ours; in many European countries, hours are still injuriously long and wages inadequate to the demands of a civilised life. Yet employers of this cheap labour cannot produce so profitably as Lancashire can. "On the general efficiency of British labour as compared with that of any foreign country witnesses are practically unanimous," says the Report of the Tariff Commission. (Sec. 89.) In short, the English cotton manufacturer produces more cheaply and more profitably, upon the whole, than any competitor, and in the highest branches of the trade, can hardly be approached. The reasons of this pre-eminence are that the good conditions enforced by law and the comparatively high wage enforced by the trade unions combine to create for him the most efficient body of cotton workers in the world. Once more, the facts of industrial history proclaim the truth that efficiency is not the cause but

the product of fair wages, healthy surroundings and reasonable leisure.

Do not let us be deceived into supposing that, apart from these factors, there is any peculiarity in the cotton trade to account for these developments. If there were, we should behold the ill paid and overworked cotton workers of the Southern States, many of whom are of the same race as ourselves, producing fabrics as good as ours, at the same speed, and equal profit. Indeed, we need not go so far as America for our object lesson. The South West of our own country may provide it. Bristol, no less than the more northerly parts of the island, had its cotton mills. The same advantages were presented: the port open to the Atlantic, the moist westerly climate, the plentiful supply of labour. The same factory law applies, the same hours and conditions are enforced; the employers, of late years at any rate, have been men of capital and of intelligence. One factor only has been absent: the powerful organisation of workers. Because of its absence, wages have fallen to the level of unskilled trades in the district. Men do not work in the cotton trade in Bristol, nor adult women. The employees are girls, earning the

low wage of a Bristol factory girl. Of profits there have, for years, been practically none. No employer can afford to make improvements in methods of production; and at the present moment it is, I believe, an open secret that the one remaining mill is only kept open because its owner is unwilling to turn away the hands.[1] But for the strong trade unions of the northern operatives, the whole of England's cotton trade at the present day might be in the position of Bristol's cotton trade, and the Lancashire worker might be toiling for as many hours and as small a wage as his German competitor. To the organisation of the workers, English labour owes that comparatively fortunate position which is, as Mr Schoenhof, years ago, perceived, "the only vantage ground which England possesses and which secures to her the safe and indisputable rulership of the commerce of the world."[2]

In this particular industry of cotton, other

[1] Since writing these lines I have been informed that improved machinery and management have been introduced, and that the outlook has consequently improved also. But it is safe to prophesy that unless her wages should rise very substantially, the Bristol worker will not reach the standard of the Lancashire worker.

[2] Economy of High Wages, p. 66.

nations, as he points out, whose labour is ill paid and whose hours of work are long, are trying to defend themselves by a high protective tariff "against the results of England's high pay and short hours." . . . "Yet it is all machine work driven by steam power and conducted in factories under the best intellectual management which the countries afford. But how world wide the difference in the results!"[1]

World wide indeed—not as to national trade only, but as to national happiness.

[1] Economy of High Wages, p. 398

CHAPTER IV

THE MINIMUM WAGE IN PRACTICE

Sweating not unknown in the colonies—Instances published by *Otago Daily Times*—Underpaid workers in 1895—Epidemic of strikes—State arbitration proposed in New Zealand—Conciliation Boards and Court of Arbitration—Details of New Zealand law—Objections raised by critics in England—Difference in position of British and of New Zealand trade unions—New Zealand freed from strikes—The question of the poorest workers — Wellington match makers — Tailoresses under an agreement and tailoresses under an award—The under rate worker—Victoria and Wage Boards—Campaign of the *Age*—Factory Act of 1896—Details of Wage Board scheme—The first six Boards—Boards in 1905—Several instances of the "determinations" of Wage Boards—Effect on homework—The case of New South Wales—Summing up.

THE evils of underpayment, being the invariable result of unlimited competition, inevitably show themselves in any country where trade has come into existence. The oversea colonies of Britain are not overcrowded, are naturally rich, and ought to be free from evils accumulated during an old civilisation. Yet, thirty years ago, instances of underpayment, exactly on all fours with those exhibited in the Queen's Hall in the

summer of 1906, were to be found in New Zealand, in South Australia and in Victoria.

There, as here, newspapers called attention to the facts, and aroused the public conscience. In January 1889, the *Otago Daily Times*, "a journal distinguished amongst its fellows for caution and restraint of language," published a series of articles about underpaid labour in Dunedin. "One woman deposed that she might make 3s. 6d. on a good day but it would be by stitching from half past eight in the morning until eleven at night."[1]

"Yet she counted her lot at that time almost happy, for she had lately escaped from a factory where, do what she would, she could not earn more than eighteenpence daily by working until all hours of the night." Another woman reported that she "finished cotton shirts at 1s. 6d. a dozen"[2] and that she

[2] W. Pember Reeves. State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand. Vol. ii. p. 29. To this volume I am indebted for the account of all the facts preceding and accompanying the enactment of the earliest laws under which a minimum wage could be legally fixed in the colonies. Any reader desiring fuller details of these most interesting developments should refer to Mr Reeves's second volume.

[2] It seems from the context that 1s. 6d. was the price paid for making the dozen shirts throughout, and that the finisher's share was but a part of this, since a night's work, in which she did a dozen shirts and something more, only brought her one shilling.

could "get through a dozen and a half in the factory between nine o'clock and six in the evening; then she carried a dozen more home and sat up sewing by lamplight until they were finished. . . . On one of these evenings she had a stroke of good luck; she was allowed to take away a dozen flannels as well as her dozen shirts. Both bundles were done when she went to bed—at three o'clock in the morning—and by that night's work she earned a whole shilling." (p. 30.)

Individual and combined action followed these revelations. A union of tailoresses was formed and an effective factory law passed. Wages, however, continued upon a downward course, and in 1895 "there were in the colony 591 factory girls who were getting no pay for their work, and 175 who were paid half a crown a week or less." (p. 34.) Such facts as these were enough to show to thoughtful observers that, unless special measures were introduced, the evils of European countries would grow with the growth of the colonies. Another series of events helped to focus attention upon labour problems. This was the epidemic of unusually widespread and bitter strikes which ran through the various colonies in the early nineties. Into the details

of these it is unnecessary to enter. It is enough to say that, in at least one instance, associated workers demanded what they had no right to demand and that, in at least three instances, associated employers refused even to confer upon the demands of the workers. The mining companies, for example, declared in a public manifesto that "The mining companies claim the right to work the mines as they deem best and cannot refer this right to arbitration." (p. 95.) Acts of violence were committed; the public was greatly inconvenienced; much money was lost; and people began to look about for some legislation that would obviate similar troubles in the future.

This was the opportunity of Mr Reeves, at that time Minister of Labour in New Zealand. He saw that the path of progress lay along the line of organisation; and that the field of State Arbitration is not between man and man, but between association and association. He recognised that organised society has a right to demand of its different sections that degree of class organisation which renders possible the application of a common law. Hitherto, sectional combination had been used principally as a basis for organised war; in Mr Reeves's plan,

it was to furnish the basis of an organised peace. Following out the stages by which industrial disputes develop into strikes, he substituted for each a more peaceful step. His Bill, respecting the divisions of the colony into districts, allowed the creation in any district of a local Conciliation Board, and established a supreme Court of Arbitration. The Conciliation Boards were to come into existence "if petitioned for," and were to be "composed of equal numbers of masters and men, with an impartial chairman." (p. 101.) The right of electing representatives to serve on these Boards was given not to individuals but solely to such bodies of employers or of workers (men or women) as registered themselves under the Act. An association of as few as seven workers may, at the present time, claim registration. When registered, such associations are called Industrial Unions, and become corporations "with power to hold land, to sue and be sued, and to recover dues from their members." (p. 103.)

The functions of a Conciliation Board are as follows: On receiving a request from any party to an industrial dispute, it calls before it the other parties concerned, hears, examines and awards. No strike or lock-out is per-

mitted while the case is under hearing. The Board has full power to take evidence and to compel attendance. At first, the awards of the Conciliation Boards had no legal force but, in 1900, the amended Act made these awards "final and legally binding unless appealed against within a month." (p. 127.)

The higher tribunal, the Court of Arbitration, consists of "a president with two assessors, one selected by associations of employers the other by federations of trade unions." (p. 102.) The three members of the Court are appointed for three years and, unless bankruptcy, crime or insanity intervenes, cannot be removed except by a vote of both Houses of Parliament. The Court is not fettered by precedent, settles its own procedure, and may take any evidence that it chooses, "whether strictly legal evidence or not." It may hear cases publicly or privately at its discretion. Its award is given by the majority of the three members, and they may decide whether the award is to have the force of law or "merely to be in the nature of good advice." If it is to have legal force it must be filed in the Supreme Court and after that any party to it may be prosecuted for a breach of it. The penalty payable by a

single employer or trade union is limited to £500; and in case of a union's possessing insufficient funds to meet the penalty every member is liable up to £10. The award cannot be appealed against nor quashed by any other tribunal, nor can the proceedings be carried into any other court. On the other hand, awards remain in currency only for a fixed period, which need not be longer than three years at the outside, and at the end of which the matter may be reopened.

Though only registered unions of masters and of workers can elect the officials of the Boards and of the Court, yet the jurisdiction of these tribunals extends to all employers and to all workers whether registered under the Act or not. In any district where there is a duly registered body of workers but none of employers the Governor in Council may nominate the conciliators required to make up a Board.

Such were the general features of the Act that after three years of endeavour was passed at the end of 1894 and came into force in 1895. It passed amid steady opposition from employers and with extremely little support from public opinion. In 1900, after five years' experience of its workings,

when a consolidated and amended Act was introduced, only one voice was lifted to attack its general principle. Not from its neighbours, who are intimate with the workings of it, but from this side of the ocean have come the attacks to which it has been exposed. It has been contended, again and again, by English newspapers that the measure is unduly favourable to trade unions, a contention much strengthened in appearance by the fact that in various trades awards have been made requiring employers to give preference to unionists, so long as the union can supply men qualified and ready to fill vacancies. Such awards, however, are by no means invariable; each case is tried on its merits, and the Court is largely guided by the general custom of each trade. It must be borne in mind also that the position of a New Zealand union is very different from that of a British union, and that this difference has been largely brought about by the colonial law, in the interest not of the union but of public peace and convenience. As Mr Reeves justly remarks: "In New Zealand the community, mainly for the purpose of self protection, has deprived trade unionists of the right of striking—of the sacred right of in-

surrection to which all workmen rightly or wrongly believe that they owe most of what lifts them above serfdom. The Arbitration Act, moreover, deliberately encourages workmen to organise. When, in obedience to the law, they renounce striking and register as industrial unions, it does not seem amiss that they should receive some special consideration. Their exertions and outlay in successfully conducting arbitration cases benefit non-unionists as well as themselves, though the non-unionists have done nothing to help them. Nor need the preference entail any hardship to their employers. Non-unionist labour is usually valued either because it is cheaper or because it is more peaceable. But under the Arbitration law non-unionists must get the same pay as unionists, and unionist strikes are abolished. It is only the non-unionists (in a trade where there is no award in force) who can strike, and who—though rarely and then only in petty groups—do. They are, therefore, to that extent, the more dangerous servants of the two. Nor, be it noted, does an employer who has only non-union men in his factory stand clear of the Act. Nor again can he take himself out of it by discharging his

union hands and pleading that he has none in his employ. If an award has been made dealing with the trade in his district, he is bound by it as much as his competitors who employ union labour." [1]

In short, New Zealand has taken out of the hands of organised labour its principal weapon and has placed that weapon in the hand of the state. The right of waging industrial war is, now, in New Zealand denied to unions either of workers or of employers. To have enforced this denial without loss to either side and at the same time to have encouraged organisation is a feat that any British minister may reasonably desire to emulate.

It is quite certain that, without the Arbitration Act, New Zealand would not have enjoyed that immunity from labour battles which in fact it has enjoyed. The use of the Act happened to coincide, as its author points out, with a revival of trade; and a revival of trade is, as every experienced trade unionist knows, the period in which strikes may hope to be successful. "Instead, however, of striking on a rising market, as the

[1] W. Pember Reeves. State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand. Vol. ii. pp. 111-112.

traditional custom of trade unionism has been, the New Zealand unions were able to arbitrate upon it"—to the saving of much money, much suffering and much ill feeling

Other objectors complain that the Arbitration Act does nothing to help the unorganised—always the most helpless—workers. Those who make this complaint have failed to appreciate the value of that important provision according to which a group of as few as seven (originally as few as five) workers in any industry are allowed to register themselves as an industrial union. Even in the poorest and most scattered of English trades it would be an easy matter to collect seven persons who, *if they knew themselves protected from dismissal*, would be willing to appeal for improved conditions to a Conciliation Board. So far from shutting out the unorganised, the Industrial Arbitration law opens to them a door by which they may share in all the advantages of organisation without waiting for a preliminary improvement in their conditions; and, at the same time that it holds out to them a powerful helping hand, makes them not merely passive recipients of a benefit, but active agents in their own emancipation.

Would that the same door were open to our poorest workers on this side of the ocean; that the worser paid of English factory workers could, by registering some seven of their number, present their case to a court or, with the support of the court behind them, form such an agreement as was made with their employers by the Wellington match-factory employees in November 1902, and brought into court for registration. The schedule of this agreement contains but five clauses and is a model of brevity and directness. Clause I. settles the working hours, on the basis of a 45 hours week. Clause II. fixes (in 52 words) the piece work rates of pay for five different branches of work. Clause III. deals with the question of union and non-union labour, and requires "the company" (there was but the one employing company, apparently, in the district) "when engaging a worker or workers" to "employ a member or members of the union in preference to non-members, provided there are members of the union equally qualified with non-members to perform the particular work required to be done, and ready and willing to undertake it; provided, further, that any person now employed in this industrial district in this trade, and any other

person desirous of entering the trade now residing or who may hereafter reside in this industrial district, may become a member of the union upon payment of an entrance fee not exceeding 5s., and of subsequent contributions, whether payable weekly or not, not exceeding 6d. per week, upon the written application of the person so desiring to join the union, without ballot or other election.[1] Clause IV. requires the executive of the union to keep an "employment book" containing the names, addresses and employers during the previous six months of members wanting to be employed; the book to be "open to the company and its servants without fee or charge during all working hours on every working day." Clause V. runs as follows: "When members of the union and non-members are employed together, there shall be no distinction between members and non-members, and both shall work together in harmony and shall receive equal pay for equal work."[1]

I have thought it worth while to quote these clauses in some detail because they are typical and illustrate the safeguards both to the employer and to the non-union worker by

[1] Journal of the Department of Labour. New Zealand. Vol. XI. pp. 267-268

which a preference clause is generally accompanied. The whole schedule occupies only 46 lines of print—exactly one page of the volume in which it appears.

We see, by this example, that the Arbitration Act does not exclude collective bargaining between workers and employers but allows the registration and enforcement of terms to which the representatives of both parties have agreed. Thus the field of legitimate activity is still left open to organisations both of employers and of workers: the Act merely provides for peaceable and equitable settlement in cases where the parties fail to settle matters for themselves. An instance occurs in the history of the tailoresses in which one district was governed by an agreement, and another by an award. The employers in the latter district complained that the employers in the former were allowed to compete with them on unfair terms; and the court having compared the terms of the agreement with those of the award, found that the agreement was actually in some instances the higher of the two and that, in the instances where it was lower, the wages actually paid were double those set down. This was in 1903. In 1905 the trade was once more in court asking for the establishment of a weekly

wage. The court, acceding to what it declares to have been a general wish, did fix a weekly wage, but made the award for a year only, from Jan. 1906 to Jan. 1907. The schedule —rather a long one—fixes the terms of apprenticeship to each class of work, the wages of apprentices (5s. a week, rising at fixed intervals by 2s. 6d. at a time); defines, according to the length of her experience in her special department, a first-class and a second-class "improver," a "journeywoman, and an under rate worker," and fixes minimum rates for all but the last named. Improvers in coat and vest work are to receive, for second class hands (girls just out of apprenticeship) a minimum of 17s.; first class hands (with another year's experience) one of £1, 0s. 6d.; journeywomen are to be paid not less than £1, 5s. 0d.[1] An under rate wage, for old, infirm or incompetent persons, may be fixed by the worker concerned and the trade union, by the Chairman of the Conciliation Board or by any person appointed by the Board. Such settlements of under rate wages continue for only six months, and opportunity is given to the union and to the applicant of "calling

[1] Journal of the Department of Labour. New Zealand, Vol. XIV. pp. 70-76.

evidence and adducing arguments" before the adjudicator. In the four districts to which this award applies a tailoress, who is a "full hand" and a competent worker, can now be sure that her week's work will not be paid at a lower rate than 25s. a week. There is no prohibition of home work; but the home worker must be paid at the established piece work rates, and an employer paying less exposes himself to fines up to the sum of £100. Thus, in district after district, and in trade after trade, a system has been established which combines the apparently contradictory virtues of uniformity and elasticity.

The scene of a sitting of the Court of Arbitration can easily be called up from newspaper descriptions. The room is plain and not large. At the upper end, between the two arbitrators, sits the judge in wig and gown. Men and masters, easily distinguishable by differences of dress, manner and speech, face each other across a table; in the body of the room reporters and a sprinkling of spectators are gathered to listen. The matter in hand is stated; then the representative of the men's union or of the associated masters sets forth the plea of his clients, no counsel being employed except by agreement of both parties.

The cost and the duration of proceedings are, no doubt, both lessened by this provision; and it is said that the unprofessional advocates on the two parts often show remarkable ability in the conduct of the case.

In Victoria a different method of fixing a minimum wage has been adopted; the method not of the Conciliation Board and Court of Arbitration but of the Wage Board. The mechanism of the Wage Boards is much more easily described and understood than that of the New Zealand Boards and Court; and it is, no doubt, partly, though not wholly, upon this account that advocates of the minimum wage are apt to propose the Victorian rather than the New Zealand model for imitation. Personally, however, considerable study of both plans has convinced me that the New Zealand method is, in practice, the less cumbrous, and that it includes features of great value that are lacking in the Victorian system.

Especially valuable seems to be the singular ease with which its machinery can be brought to bear upon the poorest workers. Were the law of New Zealand also the law of England, I would myself engage to collect, within six months, from each of half a dozen underpaid women's trades the seven workers necessary to

form the required unions, and so to bring these half dozen trades within the purview of a Conciliation Board. Such Boards are established upon being asked for by a registered association of workers (or of employers), whereas the Victorian Wage Boards can only be established in any trade by a resolution of both Houses of Parliament; and, on this side of the ocean at least, Parliaments are apt to require much moving before they can be made to act.

In Melbourne, as in New Zealand, the first impulse towards the legal fixing of a minimum wage came from a newspaper. That powerful organ, the *Age*, for many years continued to print articles on the subject of underpayment and bad conditions of work. A Royal Commission was appointed and made a Report as early as 1884, but no practical reforms were attempted. The *Age* continued its crusade. In 1893 a Board of Inquiry was appointed and the evidence taken by that body showed the state of the workers in several trades to be deplorable. In 1895 an Anti-Sweating League was formed and, finally, in 1896, a new Factory and Shops Act was passed, of which the most remarkable clauses were those dealing with the establishment of Wage Boards. Provision

was made for the appointment of special boards "to fix wages and piece work rates for persons employed either inside or outside factories in making clothing or wearing apparel or furniture, or in bread making or baking, or in the business of a butcher or seller of meat."[1]

Permission was also given by the Act for the appointment of similar boards in other trades "provided a resolution has been passed by either House[2] declaring it is expedient to appoint such a Board."

These Boards consist of not less than four nor more than ten members, half of whom are elected by employers and half by employees, or, failing election, are appointed by the Governor in Council.

The methods by which the members of Wage Boards are elected is extraordinarily cumbrous and could scarcely be imitated in any large industrial community. The latest regulations for such elections (dated Feb. 19, 1906) are embodied in no less than 28 clauses. In each specified trade two electoral rolls must be prepared by the factory inspectors, the one including names and addresses of all workers,

[1] This account of the establishment of the first Wage Boards is derived from Mr Reeves's State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand, vol. ii. chap. 1.

[2] A resolution of both Houses is now required.

the other those of all employers. In order to facilitate the compilation of this trade census, all employers are required to send to the inspectors lists of the workpeople employed by them. Candidates must be nominated by 10 employers or by 25 employees; and voting papers are printed containing the names of all the candidates.

"The Chief Inspector shall cause every voting paper to be posted at least four days prior to the date of such election to every elector whose name and address is on the roll of electors for the special board." The elector must strike out the names of all but those candidates for whom he desires to vote and must return the paper by 4 o'clock on the day of election. Imagine such a process as this in one of our own ill paid trades! The workers in such trades are migratory in the highest degree; by the time that the addresses of all qualified electors had been collected, one third of them, at least, would have ceased to be accurate. This fact alone would lead both to omissions and to duplications. The clerical labour and postage would be so heavy as to be a serious national expense; and the magnitude of the enumeration would render its completion a work of time. I doubt whether a Board to

deal with any larger British trade could possibly be elected in less than a twelvemonth; and even such expedition as this would demand the employment of an extensive special staff.

The members of the Board, when it has at last been formed may elect an outside chairman, and if they fail to do so, the Governor in Council may appoint one. The Boards may fix "either wage rates or piecework rates, or both; must also fix the hours for which the rate of wage is fixed and rate of pay for overtime." They may also fix the proportions of apprentices and improvers to be employed; and may "determine that manufacturers may be allowed to fix piecework rates based on the minimum wage. . . . The Chief Inspector may, however, challenge any rate so paid, and the employer may have to justify it before the Board." The power to grant a licence to any aged or infirm worker to work at less than the established minimum wage rests with the Chief Inspector.

The first Boards were only six in number. Several of these had much difficulty in arriving at a "Determination." The Men's and Boys' Clothing Board, for instance, occupied nine months in drawing up theirs, and finally

established both time and piece rates. With the idea of compensating the home worker for incidental expenses and loss of time, the piece work rates were fixed a shade higher than the time rate—with the result that employers ceased to send work out. In other instances where there has been no such difference, the compulsion to pay home workers at something near a living wage has tended in the same direction.

Though the number of Boards was steadily enlarged, the legislation allowing their formation was for some years persistently held as experimental, and not until 1904, after eight years of experience were they made a permanent part of the law of Victoria.

There were at the end of 1905—the latest date for which the Report of the Factory Inspectors is available — 38 Boards the determinations of which were in force. The wages and conditions fixed by these Boards vary to a remarkable decree, and it is to be regretted that the smallest advances seem, in general to have been granted in the worst paid trades. In some cases the established minimum for a competent adult worker is sadly low. For instance the female chocolate coverer of over 21 has a minimum of only

17s. weekly, while her fellow worker who is under 21 but over 18 may be paid as little as 14s. a week. The minimum for a youth of the same age is also 14s. but the adult male chocolate coverer (a person whom I have never found in England) must be paid not less than 30s.[1] Worse still is the case of the jam trade in which the minimum for "females of 18 years and upwards" is but 14s.[2] Such determinations as these point to a desire on the part of the Board rather to prevent a further drop of wages than to effect a rise to what may be esteemed a "living wage" Still, even to arrest the downward course is a step in the right direction, and the example of the millinery trade, in which there is no Board, shows that the jam maker at 14s. is probably better off than she would be were there no determination at all in her trade. Miss Cuthbertson reports that in 1901 the average wage for milliners was 11s. 4d. per week per individual. "In 1902 the average fell to 11s. 1d.; in 1903 to 10s. 4d.; in 1904 to 9s. 10d.; —and possibly this year will witness a further fall."[3] Yet the trade steadily grows, the

[1] Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories, work rooms and shops. Victoria, 1905, p. 62.

[2] Report of Chief Inspector of Factories. Victoria, p. 68.

[3] Report of Chief Inspector of Factories. Victoria, 1905, p. 43

number of persons employed rising from 758 in 1901 to 1410 in 1904.

Dressmakers, however, who work under a determination, average 12s. 3d.[1] The determination in this trade did not come into force until September 1904; and in 1903 the average wage of dressmakers in Victoria was 11s. 11d. These averages, of course, include apprentices and learners. The established minimum for a competent dressmaker is now 16s. per week.[2]

This contrast serves to suggest how valuable has been the influence of the Boards in checking the fall of wages. An average weekly difference of half a crown between the wages of dressmakers and of milliners would scarcely have arisen of itself, especially in a comparatively small industrial community. Some Boards have evidently been timid; and some have shown—to put the matter mildly—no strong desire to approximate the wages of women to those of men engaged in very similar work. The difference between 17s. and 30s. in the case of chocolate coverers may serve as an instance. On the other hand, the Bootmaking Board and the Brush-

[1] Report of Chief Inspector of Factories. Victoria, 1905, p. 19.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

making Board have courageously enacted that women employed in certain branches shall have "the same rate as males." Thus a woman in the bootmaking trade who is engaged in "making, finishing or clicking (but not skiving or trimming) insides or outsides or stuff cutting by hand" must receive a minimum of 40s. a week; while for women in some other branches of the same industry the minimum is fixed at 20s.[1]

The Brushmaking determination, even bolder, runs thus: "Any females employed in any of the above classes of work to be paid at the same rates as males." These rates vary from a minimum of 21s. a week to one of 64s.[2]

Even the lowest of these minima would be an advance of at least 25% on the wages of most homeworking brushmakers in London. In Victoria the average throughout the whole trade was, in 1905, £1, 9s. 2d.[3]

Some Boards have been less successful than others. The mingled ignorance, astuteness and bland mendacity of the Chinese furniture makers appear to have baffled the Furniture

[1] Report of Chief Inspector of Factories. Victoria, p. 58.

[2] Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories. Victoria, 1905, p. 60.

[3] *Ibid*, p. 14.

Board, as far as the Chinese department of the trade is concerned; and as the figures quoted show, the minimum fixed in some women's trades is far too low. But, looking at the Report of the Chief Inspector—a most interesting document—it seems impossible to doubt that the Boards have, in trade after trade, both arrested the fall of wages and (not always but often) effected a rise. No doubt the determinations are sometimes evaded; so, in our own country, are the Factory Acts sometimes evaded, yet the general influence for good of the Factory Acts is no longer a matter of doubt. That neither the Industrial Arbitration Act nor the Wage Boards have by their action checked the trade of the colonies in which they exist seems to be established beyond question. The Wage Boards, without any other prohibitory effort, seem by the mere process of forbidding underpayment to have imposed a check upon the most unsatisfactory sorts of home work. As M. Aftalion has pointed out, home work, in large part, subsists solely on account of its evils. Work given out only because it might be sweated naturally ceases to be given out when sweating is stopped. On the other hand, home work of a better kind; the home

work that is harmful neither to the worker nor to the community, is not checked merely by a provision that it shall be properly paid. While it is very desirable that no person shall work at home for very poor pay or under very bad conditions, it is emphatically not desirable that no person whatever shall be allowed to work at home for money. Miss Thear, one of the Victorian inspectors, reports a considerable decrease in home work in the shirt trade, the tasks formerly performed by outdoor hands "and in some cases by elderly women who are now recipients of the old-age pension" are now being performed in the factories by herring-boning, button-hole and button sewing machines. "In addition to getting the old-age pension and going to work inside of factories, other means of employment seem to have opened up for others who were formerly out workers. Some have boarded-out children to care for, and some are registered under the Infant Life Protection Act."[1]

Miss Cuthbertson, on the same page, says: "The tendency in all trades is to get the work done in factories, where the supervision is

[1] Report of Chief Inspector of Factories. Victoria, 1905, p. 39.

closer, and where, with improved machinery, work can be turned out much more cheaply." The minimum wage law has, in fact, hastened the course of that development upon which most trades, and the clothing trades, perhaps, especially, had already entered.

Legislation of a similar character to that of the sister colonies has been established in New South Wales, and the kindness of friends in Sydney has supplied me with much matter published and unpublished; but, after careful consideration, I have decided not to attempt any account of the minimum wage law of New South Wales. The reasons for this abstention are twofold. In the first place the Act is but five years old, and its history, therefore, is far less instructive than that of the legislation in New Zealand and in Victoria. In the second place the accounts received point some one way and some another, so that it is difficult to draw from them any plain conclusion. I am well aware that by passing over the case of New South Wales I expose myself to the accusation of adducing only the favourable examples and of disregarding those that have not succeeded. To this it may fairly be replied that although the New South Wales law has not apparently fully succeeded, neither has it entirely failed.

It is still in a stage of probation, and therefore of far less value to the student than such laws as have progressed beyond that stage. Moreover, even if it were true—as most emphatically it is not—that the Colonial experiments had all completely failed, it would by no means follow that to devise a successful minimum wage law was a task beyond the wit of man.

In fact, however, both forms of minimum wage law—the Arbitration Court and the Wage Boards—have demonstrably helped to raise wages and to diminish underpayment within their jurisdiction. The Industrial Arbitration Act, in particular, is a very remarkable piece of constructive legislation, the full scope of which will probably be more and more perceptible with the development of the land to which it belongs. Its balance, its wide applicability, the simplicity and promptitude of its working, deserve to be better comprehended. The Wage Board, by comparison, lacks originality, flexibility and ease.

Both examples have great value for British students; yet it does not follow that either, in precisely its Colonial form, is altogether suited to the industrial needs of Britain. A prejudice against compulsory arbitration—a prejudice which I venture to think rests in some degree

upon imperfect comprehension of the New Zealand law—is strong among British trade unionists, and the work of dispelling this would be long and arduous. On the other hand, the comparative slowness and cumbrousness of the Wage Board system and the absence of any means by which the workers can claim the help of the Board are features only too much in accord with English inertness and officialdom. It seems much to be desired that, if Wage Boards should come to be created in this country, the appointment of them should be effected in the same manner as the appointment of the New Zealand Conciliation Boards: *i.e.*, on the request of seven or more associated workers; and it is quite imperative that some simpler and less costly method of choosing the representatives of labour and of capital, respectively, should be devised. To establish in this country a system which, proved to be almost unworkable or of which the machinery moved so slowly as to be always in arrear of actual conditions would tend to promote rather than to abate the evil of sweating.

CHAPTER V

FOREIGN COMPETITION

High wages and high prices not necessarily connected—Effect of increased wages in different groups of trades—Trades in which there is a margin for increase—Varying wages in the same trade—Scottish Wholesale Co-operative Society's shirt factory—Trades in which higher wages would lead to improved methods—Displacement of workers—Cheapened production—Increased demand and increased employment—Trades in which higher wages would lead to higher prices—Foreign legislation against sweating—Effect of higher wages upon home market—Valuelessness to the country of very ill paid trades—The two lines along which trade may develop—The line of cheap labour—Consequences to the British worker—The line of good work—Summing up.

THE foregoing chapters will have been written in vain if they have not succeeded in showing that there is no necessary connection between high wages and high selling prices; but that, on the contrary, high wages, in the great majority of cases, actually conduce to cheap production. Were this invariably the case, it is obvious that a general rise of wages, far from encouraging foreign competition, would rather form a barrier against it. And this, in fact, would be—as it is in some instances already—the case in many trades.

It may be well briefly to consider the various groups of cases that would arise in consequence of a general rise in the remuneration of labour. There exists, in the first place, a considerable group of trades in which, for similar work in respect of goods sold at the same price, different employers pay very different rates of wage. A very remarkable instance is furnished, in one of the worst paid trades, by the shirt factory of the Scottish Wholesale Co-operative Society. In that establishment, turning out goods for working class customers, women have for years received about double the wages of the average home working shirt maker, they not providing, as does she, the sewing cotton used. In October 1906 the average wage paid to workers in this factory was 18s. 3d. per week, and their week was one of 44 hours.[1] Yet the factory pays and has done so for many years.[2]

[1] See the speech of Mr Maxwell (to whom personally, it may be added, this excellent state of things is due) on p. 38 of the National Anti-Sweating League's Report of a Conference on the Minimum Wage.

[2] A very strange instance of divergence of wages in one factory came under my notice some 15 or 16 years ago. This also was in the shirt trade. A strike arose in a large factory, and when a register came to be taken of the wages received by the various women it was discovered—greatly to the

It is therefore clear that even in the ready made shirt trade it is possible to pay reasonably good wages, to compete with the "sweater," and yet to make a profit. Thus the enforcement of a minimum weekly wage very near the level of Mr Maxwell's 18s. 3d. would neither kill the trade nor stimulate the importation of foreign shirts. It would merely impose upon other employers that standard of management and methods which Mr Maxwell has chosen voluntarily to adopt. Those employers who lacked intelligence or flexibility to carry on a factory on these terms would, it is true, be driven out of business; but their customers would not cease to buy nor to be supplied at the old price. The only change

surprise of the workers concerned—that there was a difference of almost 50 per cent. between the rates paid in one workroom and those paid in another, both being under the same roof, and the work being so absolutely identical that the two groups were frequently engaged upon garments cut by the same stroke from the same roll of material. The one room was superintended by a forewoman who resisted any attempt to lower wages, and who, being a valuable official, was able to impose her wishes; in the other the forewoman meekly accepted any reductions proposed by the firm. I need hardly add that the young women who worked in the former room were markedly superior in appearance, in manners and in intelligence to those belonging to the latter. Those who worked under the good forewoman were, indeed, some of the best looking and most agreeable girls with whom I have ever been brought into contact.

would be that none of us would, any longer, be buying shirts at which some woman had sewn, as Hood said,

> "with a double thread
> At once a shirt and a shroud."

There are other groups of trades in which the history of the cotton trade would be repeated, that is to say, the employer who found himself compelled to pay higher wages would at once introduce better machinery—either in the narrow sense of actual appliances or in the wider sense of improved organisation and management. Such an employer would also, as the cotton masters have done, demand better work from his employees, and would get it. At first there might be a diminution in the number of hands employed; but if, as almost always happens, the improved methods led to a considerable reduction in the cost of production and consequently to a lowered selling price, demand would immediately increase, and more workers would again be wanted. There is no reason in the nature of things why a rise of wages and a powerful labour organisation should not do for the silk trade and the woollen trade of Britain what they have already done for the cotton trade.

In the first group of these trades, then, no workers would be displaced, and the conditions of the market would remain unaltered; in the second, there would, at first, probably be a displacement and afterwards, probably, a renewed, or even an increased demand for workers.

We come next to a group of trades which may exist, but of the existence of which I personally am somewhat sceptical. These are the trades in which there is neither margin of profit nor room for improvements that might make up for the additional outlay upon heightened wages. In these trades—if such there be—it is undeniable that if British wages rose while foreign wages remained stationary the foreigner would be extremely likely to capture the market.

But there are various matters that must be set down upon the other side of the account. To begin with, our foreign competitors are themselves uneasy about the existence of sweating within their borders. It is almost certain that German legislation directed against this evil will precede legislation in this country; while in America, as may indeed be judged by the quotations from recent American books that appear in these pages, there are many

persons much concerned with the problem of underpaid labour. If our foreign competitors should keep step with ourselves in the prohibition of extreme underpayment, the balance of international trade would be in no way disturbed. Nay, if only Germany should do so, the disturbance to the English market would not be serious.

Moreover, the payment of high wages to working people has, in itself, a beneficial effect upon the home market. Some people write and speak as though money when it once passed into the hands of a wage earner passed out of existence. But in fact it almost always returns very quickly into active circulation and thus quickens the national turnover. As a general rule a workman, when his wages rise, spends his extra money upon additional comfort for himself and his family; buys more and better food, more and better clothes, more and better furniture; often he moves to a better dwelling and almost always he extends his recreations. The chances are that he will spend something in belonging to a club or a friendly society. He will not, however, as his enemies are fond of asserting, generally drink more; it is to the man who lives with his family in one room,

not to the man who has a comfortable parlour, that the public-house looks so attractive. We may say without much doubt that these will be his modes of expenditure because we have among us plenty of well paid artisans, and observation teaches that these are in fact the ways in which they spend their money. Now, many of these channels of expenditure are practically not open to foreign competition. Bread for English eating must be baked in English bakehouses: milk is not yet imported: the retail shop-keeper, the bricklayer, the omnibus driver and the railway servant must follow their avocations on the hither side of the sea. The better paid worker thus, without any premeditation or patriotic design, tends, by the mere process of buying what he wants, to set his fellow countrymen working. It is quite possible that the increase of demand thus created would more than counterbalance the loss of any trade the retention of which depends upon the continuance of underpayment. Nor is this all. It is a question whether any trade in such a condition is either worth keeping or capable of being kept. An experienced employer who is at the head of a large and successful enterprise, writes to me: "Broadly speaking,

I am convinced that an occupation which does not admit of a decent living wage is an occupation we are better without and one which in due time will die. I mean that the requirements of the Factories and Workshops Act must kill it. A trade which can only live by means of inadequate wages and cheap squalid unhealthy buildings is doomed." Such a trade while it still endures is not really a source of national profit. The workers whose lives it drains, not being supported by the price paid for their labour, must come eventually to be partly or wholly supported by other people. They are, in fact, a national burden, whether the charge is nominally borne by the State or by private citizens. Poverty, dirt and disease are very costly to the country in which they prevail; and they are inevitable results of underpayment.

We may seek the development of our trade along either of two lines—we may aim either at underselling our competitors or at surpassing them. If we elect to take the line of cheapness, and also determine to seek that cheapness by paying very low wages, we must confine ourselves to goods that demand neither very high skill nor very elaborate machinery.

But these are precisely the sort of goods that can best be produced by nations upon a lower level than ourselves, by peasants and by dwellers in genial climates where comparatively little food and clothing and practically no heating are required. With workers such as these we can never compete on equal terms, and we should be wiser not to try. We can never bring down an Englishman to the standards of the Chinaman or of the Hindoo. But we can, in making the attempt, create among ourselves a class of helots, degraded labour slaves, living on a level that shocks our national conscience. To do this is to keep open a sore in our midst and to run a constant risk of those revolts and disturbances which are the greatest possible danger and interruption to the regular course of trade—a greater danger perhaps than that of being undersold by foreigners. For the long-suffering of the English poor, though amazing, is not probably quite unlimited. No national life can be stable while large numbers of the people live in great misery. The best safeguard of national peace is a general distribution of comfort and independence. And the safest paths towards this state of security are good education and good payment for the

workers. Low wages lead by a path of intolerable suffering to an inevitable downfall. On the ascending path too there may be dangers—but they are the less dangers, and they will be faced by citizens fitter to meet them.

After all, even Great Britain cannot expect to hold all the trade of the world. What she may expect, what she can have if she will, is the commercial leadership of the world. She may show in other departments, as she has shown in cotton and in iron, that her race can produce the best workers living, and the best organisers of work; and she can continue the great lesson which others have learned from her history, but which she herself does not always remember, the lesson that, other things being equal, that nation becomes wealthiest which pays its workers best. Health, skill, intelligence: these are the true bulwarks of national prosperity; and the price of these is liberal payment for labour. Nor does the prosperity which rests upon these things injure those neighbouring nations amid which it develops. Rivalry upon the up-grade educates and improves all alike; rivalry upon the down-grade injures and degrades all, but not all alike. In that competition

the nation suffers most whose standards are highest.

To sum up in a few words: in many trades, wages could be raised out of profits without change of selling price; in some a rise of wages would lead to improvements of method, to cheapening of production and probably to a fall of selling price; in some, though probably not in many, a rise of wages would necessitate a rise of prices; and of these there may be some (it is not proved that there are) the retention of which absolutely depends upon the payment of excessively low wages.[1]

In regard to the first two groups, which together cover the greater part of the industrial field, improved payment at home would certainly give no advantage to the foreign competitor and might in some cases rather be disadvantageous to him.

In the other group, a rise of wages would probably, wherever the nature of the industry admitted of importation, lead to an increase of importation as against home production.

But in cases where the continuance of a

[1] There are no doubt plenty of industries of which employers engaged in them would declare beforehand that wages could not possibly be raised without the ruining of the trade. But employers in the cotton trade were of the same opinion and experience has shown that they were mistaken.

trade actually depends upon aggravated underpayment the trade is shown, by that very fact, to be already in a declining state, and unable to support its own cost; and no trade that is in a declining state and that offers no possibility of bettered conditions can be regarded as a valuable national asset. On the other hand, of every additional shilling paid in wages, at least sixpence is spent in employing British labour, so that if, owing to a general rise of wages, we were to lose entirely the third and lesser group of industries, we should still enjoy a greater volume of trade than before wages were raised.

Thus, when we look it squarely in the face, we perceive that the bogie of foreign competition is a bogie indeed; and that British workers well paid would have less ground than British workers ill paid to fear that their trade would be taken from them.

CHAPTER VI

GAIN TO THE NATION

Desirability of better pay to the underpaid—Report of Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration—Its hopeful side—No degenerate class—Physical and mental effects of poverty on the individual—The better paid artisan—Conclusion.

If, then, without seriously diminishing the trade of the country or the volume of employment, it is possible gradually to raise the wage of all ill paid workers to a level that will allow them something like a civilised existence, how desirable and how urgent is legislation that will bring about this result. No person, indeed, disputes the desirability of the change; the only point in question is its feasibility. To prove that the change is feasible and is impossible to be effected except by law has been the whole purpose of this volume. Now, in these last pages, it may be permissible to glance at the immense gain to the nation that would arise from a general increase in the pay of such British workers as are now grossly underpaid.

Physically, no person familiar with the poorer quarters of any industrial district can doubt that such workers are suffering seriously. The whole report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration is little more than a report of the results of extreme poverty. Amid the accumulation of melancholy facts, however, is to be found evidence of a most hopeful kind. In our own country, at least, its seems to be true that the physical deterioration which comes of poverty (as distinguished from that which comes of vice) is rather personal than hereditary, and that the starved child will regain health and normality amid better conditions; so that even in a single generation any group of British people suffering from the effects of poverty may be restored to the average standard of the race if properly fed, properly clothed, properly housed, not overworked, and allowed plenty of air. The higher death rate, the inferior physique, the poorer vitality of the ill-paid mark tendencies not inborn but acquired, all of which might and would disappear with the diminution of poverty and of that ignorance which is one outcome of poverty, and also, by reaction, one of the contributory causes of poverty. Degeneracy exists; but not a degen-

erate class; the class which we sometimes call degenerate is, as a class, merely starved. In short all that waste of human life, of human energy and of human happiness which is going on daily around us and is causing to the country a daily loss heavier than that of any campaign, is neither inevitable nor incurable. This misery might be sensibly diminished within three years, and might be ended within the lifetime of children already born.

Nor is it the body alone that suffers the deterioration of poverty. The underfed brain too, remains stunted; and to be constantly hungry is to be constantly apathetic. Lassitude, inertia, the mental dulness that knows no pleasure except of the senses, no personal initiative and no activity save in response to external stimulus, these are the characteristics of the adult whose childhood has been passed in overcrowded rooms, whose food has been insufficient, his clothing inadequate, and to whom no wider horizons have ever been opened. Such an individual knows nothing of the real joys of life; he is a valueless citizen, consuming more than he produces, a poor worker, and even when not personally vicious, an influence rather towards degradation than towards progress.

But taken early enough and fed, clothed and housed like the children of the better paid artisan, the same man might have become healthy of body and alert of mind; a reader of books, a player of outdoor games, a skilled craftsman taking delight in his good work, a citizen rendering intelligent public service, a parent of healthy hopeful children, enjoying and creating prosperity. There are hundreds of such men among the superior artisans of this country. It has been my lot to know many of them, and it is my belief that on the whole they and their families form the happiest, the most valuable and the best conducted portion of our nation. To bring up into that class those compatriots of theirs and ours who now, by no fault of their own, suffer not only the privations but also the degradations of extreme poverty is no impossible feat, and would be the greatest possible of national services. Happily there are signs of a growing public desire to remedy the appalling evils vaguely summarised under the word "sweating," and of a growing inclination to seek the remedy along the lines of endeavour marked out by our colonial brethren.

In the earnest hope that such an endeavour may be made, quickly, yet not hastily, by the

law of Great Britain, and that these chapters may as soon as possible become out of date, I offer to my fellow countrymen the conclusions gradually shaped in my own mind by nearly twenty years of work among industrial problems.

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